ONCE UPON A TIME...OR SO THE STORY GOES

ONCE UPON A TIME...OR SO THE STORY GOES:
MYTH, STORYTELLING, AND IDENTITY FORMATION IN UTOPIA

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the relationship between myth, mythmaking, storytelling, and identity formation within utopia and utopian literature. Specifically, it will explore the plight of the individual and whether or not the individual can truly 'exist' within utopia. All major surveys of utopian literature liken utopia to myth and the mythmaking process; however, no critic has specifically investigated how myth, mythmaking and storytelling inform both utopian literature and the utopian societies which they present. In the utopias investigated in this thesis, those in power use and manipulate myths and stories in order to negate selfhood and individual thought, as individual thought is seen as threatening to the social fabric. However, the story and the written word also become the key mechanism by which the protagonists attempt to resist the constraints put on them by those in power and, in doing so, attempt to assert an authentic self.

This thesis is divided into three chapters. Using George Orwell's dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the first chapter explores the inherent danger of the utopian ideal which the anti-utopianists set out to expose. Specifically, the chapter investigates how the governing elite use and manipulate myths, stories, and the written word in order to exert an ontological stranglehold on the inhabitants of Oceania to maintain their vision. The protagonist, Winston Smith, is destroyed because he attempts to use the written word in order to stand against the governing party. The final two

chapters of this thesis then explore how critical utopianists, namely Sherri Tepper in her work *The Gate to Women's Country* and Russell Hoban with *Riddley Walker,* challenge the notion that it is impossible for true individual selfhood to exist within a utopian state. As in *Nineteen Eight-Four,* it is through the written word, as well as the interpretation and subsequent manipulation of stories, that the respective protagonists Stavia and Riddley attempt to stand against, and more importantly, within their given societies as individuals. Only Riddley, however, is truly able to assert and define an authentic self, as he is the only protagonist in the three novels studied who is able tell his *own* story.

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INTRODUCTION

"Being human means having a utopia."
-Paul Tillich[1]

"Moments in which we are fully in possession of ourselves are rare and that is why we are rarely free...To act freely is to regain possession of ourselves."
-Georges Sorel[2]

Once upon a time, in a land far, far, away...or so the story goes does it not? In today's dot com world, founded on instant gratification, replete with its fast food, fast cars, video games, blinking lights, buzzing sounds, beeping horns, where, with the advent of the drive-through wedding, even lifelong commitment is based on convenience, why does the simple and timeless phrase "once upon a time" hold more power, magic, and potential than the greatest technological advancements? Why do people return over and over again to the worlds they can find only between the pages of a book? The reason is simple – unsatiated desire. Even with all the technological advancements and latest fads, we still have not found what we are looking for. Stories are important. We do not read merely to escape the world we inhabit; rather, we read in order to discover the world that may be. Literature is literature of desire. We read in

[1] Quoted in *Utopias and Utopian Thought* edited by Frank E. Manuel (p. xx).

[2] Quoted in Ruth Levitas's *The Concept of Utopia.* This quotation was originally from Bergson's *Reflections on Violence,* but she used the translation given in *From Georges Sorel* because "the earlier translation of the Bergson quotation makes little sense" (Levitas 206).

order to fill the lack which is inside us all, and in order to make our experiences and existence intelligible to ourselves. We read in order to discover who we are. In light of this, the re-emergence and proliferation of one genre of literature since the beginning of the twentieth century – utopian literature – is not surprising, for utopian literature is just that – it is the epitome of literature which envisions that which may be.

The envisioning of a better, more perfect world – utopia – is hardly a new phenomenon.[3] The specific western tradition of the literary utopia, however, "is generally agreed to have originated with Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*" (Moylan 2). In it, Hythloday recounts his voyage to Utopia, a distant and isolated island, which is ideal both socially and politically – it is the perfect world. As Tom Moylan points out in *Demand the Impossible* (3), however, Thomas More uses his removed telos, not simply to extol the virtues of Utopia itself, but also to illuminate as well as comment on the shortcomings of his own society. Social critique is a key function of utopian literature. Utopian literature critiques the author's present day society by envisioning a better way of life, exposing societal flaws in the hopes that readers will be roused to action and utopia will be attained.

There is an element of paradox, however, in More's seemingly simple and straightforward *Utopia*, which throws the entire work into question. The word Utopia is dualistic in nature. The word originated as a pun combining two

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[3] As Frank Manuel points out: although the word utopia was not coined until the publication of More's work *Utopia*, the analytic study of utopia has "had a long tradition going back to the Greeks. The conviction that certain 'ideal states' demanded critical examination was first expressed by Aristotle in Book II of the *Politics*" (Manuel ix).

Greek words, *outopia* (no place), and *eutopia* (good place). Thus, "the noun 'utopia' is now used to denote not only 'a place, state, or condition ideally perfect in respect to politics, laws, customs, and conditions,' but also an 'impossibly ideal scheme, especially for social improvement'" (More vii). As a result, whenever one attempts to confront and/or interpret a piece of utopian literature, one is faced with questions which are unanswerable, questions enmeshed in deliberate ambiguity: "is what they are reading eutopia, the good place, or outopia, no place – and are these necessarily the same thing? The pun 'utopia' has left a lasting confusion around the term utopia" (Levitas 2-3). It is a confusion which persists even with the critics of today:

> Is More's work primarily a game, an exercise in wit and playful irony, a literary joke? Or is it serious beneath its playfulness? Is it a revolutionary book that seeks to change a corrupt social system? Or is it a conservative book that longs nostalgically for a simpler time and place? (Ruppert 7)

No matter how noble or lofty the intentions of the utopian impulse are, as a result of the inherent ambiguity surrounding utopian literature and the word 'utopia' itself critics have often become frustrated, and the true ability of the utopian novel to effect social change has been thrown into question, as has the validity of the genre itself.[4] One only need consider the manner in which Moritz Kaufmann defines utopia for himself to see the problem:

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[4] Here I am mainly referring to revolutionary thinkers such as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who rejected utopia, as they believed that it was "the construction of blueprints of a future society that are incapable of realization" (Levitas 35). The political readings of utopia, will not be explicitly addressed within this thesis, as they do not pertain to my argument. I feel that the objections to the benevolent utopias is important, however, because it is out of these objections that the second major trend in utopian literature was born – the dystopian novel. For a discussion of Marx, Engels and other such thinkers, see the second chapter of Ruth Levitas's *The Concept of Utopia.*

> What is Utopia? Strictly speaking, it means a 'nowhere Land', some happy island far away, where perfect social relations prevail, and human beings, living under an immaculate constitution and a faultless government, enjoy a simple and happy existence, free from the turmoil, the harassing cares, and endless worries of actual life. (qtd. in Levitas 12)

Ruth Levitas, in *The Concept of Utopia*, is right to point out that within Kaufmann's statement, "there is an implication here that utopia is impossible" (12), and I would add that there is an air of futility as well. This 'impossible' aspect of utopia is precisely what the majority of critics, as well as readers, take issue with, and it is the reason why the classical utopias[5] written from the time of Thomas More to the late 1800's failed to take hold and effect social change. As Peter Ruppert explains:

> Their content, moreover, is so reductive and stereotyped that, for many readers, utopias are easily dismissed either as one-dimensional blueprints for socialism or as harmless escapist fantasies. Either way, their critical impact on readers seems minimal. As models of peace and social harmony, they generally fail to inspire readers: few utopian ideals are realizable or even desirable, and no utopian scheme has ever been fully implemented. (1)

What's more, as Northrop Frye asserts in his essay "Varieties of Literary Utopias," perhaps the thing that most deters a reader from subcribing to the ideologies and philosophies set out in many classic utopias is that the ideologies and philosophies set out are communal, oftentimes leaving little room for the individual and individual expression:

> In most utopias the state predominates over the individual; property is usually held in common and the characteristic features of individual life, leisure, privacy, and freedom of movement, are as a rule minimized. Most of this is, once more, simply the result of writing a utopia and

[5] Here, the term 'classical utopia' refers to the benevolent utopias written in the 'on of More's *Utopia* up until the late 1800's. These utopias are characterized by harmonious (yet static) communities. Another such example of a 'classic William Morris's *News From Nowhere*.

> accepting its conventions: the utopia is designed to describe a unified society, not individual varieties of existence. Still, the sense of individual as submerged in a social mass is very strong. (Frye 37)

Frye's statement leads us to the question: Can a person truly be happy within a utopian society if his individual impulses are stifled in the name of 'the common good'? And, in light of this, can utopia ever exist?

Lewis Mumford adds yet another dimension to the present discussion. In his essay "Utopia, the City and the Machine," he outlines not only the shortcomings and inconsistencies of the utopian genre, but also the inherent danger of the utopian vision itself:

> The more completely man is in control of physical nature, the more urgently we must ask ourselves what under the heavens is to move and guide and keep in hand the controller. This problem of an ideal, a goal, an end – even if the aim persists in shifting as much as the magnetic north pole – is a fundamental one to the utopian. (Mumford 23)

It is essential that the duality of utopian idealism be recognized. We must question the prescribed ideal and realize that oftentimes a destructive ideology is encased within that ideal. The recognition of the inherent danger of the utopian ideal is what brought about the second phase in utopian writing – the anti-utopia or dystopia.

The dawning of the twentieth century brought about an era of great and rapid change not only in terms of technology and daily life, but in utopian literature as well. Not everyone heralded the changes as positive, however, and some recognized that with the changes in industry came great implications. As Tom Moylan points out: "The twentieth century saw the victory of a system that manipulated human activity for the sake of capital accumulation and power consolidation in the hands of a few" (7). With the recognition of the possibly

insidious nature of a single utopian vision, the antithesis of the utopia was birthed – the dystopia. Classic dystopias such as George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World,* Eugene Zamiatin's *We,* and, more recently, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* set out to expose the inherent danger of the utopian vision, illustrating how oftentimes the utopian vision is too static and closed, and as a result, the individual and individuality are stifled and, at times, even completely eradicated.[6] Anti-utopians use and subvert the very conventions which characterize the static, benevolent utopia in order to create a terrifying vision:

> The full force of the anti-utopian critique is directed primarily at those boundaries that enclose utopia and set it apart as an "other" place of social harmony and happiness. These boundaries, however, are now seen as signs of alienation and containment, as barriers that repress and constrain human possibilities rather than enhance them...From the utopian perspective, as we have seen, these boundaries are necessary to guarantee freedom and happiness; from the anti-utopian perspective, however, they are seen to keep the inhabitants captive, reducing their possibilities for freedom and happiness to a uniformity and conformity that threatens the very possibility of social alternatives and even conscious life. (Ruppert 121- 22)

We as readers are once again faced with a disturbing dilemma– one that is dualistic and even paradoxical. If one wishes to free oneself from the utopian conundrum, rejecting a vision in which the individual is reduced to a faceless automaton of the utopian state, perhaps the only way to do so is to dismiss all utopian literature as lacking and contradictory, and accept the philosophies expounded by the anti-utopians. This option, however, is unrealistic, as it too leaves the reader dissatisfied:

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[6] In *Anthem* (1946) for example, Ayn Rand goes as far as to create "a collectivized dystopia in which the very word "I" is forbidden. People refer to themselves in the plural because all allowable thoughts are group thoughts" (Rabkin 5).

> Such an option is not entirely satisfactory, however, since anti-utopias are also inherently reductive, leaving us with a single menacing vision of society, a vision, moreover, which may have the unproductive effect of affirming the status quo. (Ruppert 122)

Tom Moylan echoes Ruppert's statement and also ultimately finds fault with the dystopian narrative. He points out how anti-utopias can be, and are, co-opted as a tool of political propaganda, just as were the utopias that preceded them:

> Unfortunately, the dystopian narrative itself has all too easily been recruited into the ideological attack on authentic utopian expression: commentators cite the dystopia as a sign of the very failure of utopia and consequently urge uneasy readers to settle for what is and cease their frustrating dreams for a better life. (Moylan 9)

Should one merely settle? And simply because both the utopian novel and the dystopian novel are reductive and limiting, riddled with flaws and contradictions, does this necessarily mean that the pursuit of utopia is futile and not even worth attempting? Why shouldn't one dare to dream of a better life and alternate possibilities? Is that not what it is to be human? It is precisely questions such as these, as well as the human propensity to dream and ponder, which spawned the next phase in utopian literature – the 'critical utopia.'

In his work, *Demand the Impossible*, Tom Moylan outlines the decline of utopian literature as well as its resurgence in a new form at the beginning of the 1970's:

> Utopia became a residual literary form, and the dystopia was recontained and enlisted as proof of the uselessness of utopian desire. However, this neutralizing cooptation and inversion of utopia – this static conflict between toothless utopia and bleak dystopia – was itself negated in the revival of the literary utopia that occurred after the social upheavals of the 1960's...The deep conflicts of the 1960's...significantly awakened a subversive utopianism. (9-10)

This subversive utopianism of which Moylan speaks is the 'critical utopia',[7] and, it was, in fact, Tom Moylan who was instrumental in defining, in academic terms, this new sub-genre of utopian literature.[8] Just as with the word utopia, the term 'critical utopia' draws upon two separate meanings:

> "Critical" in the Enlightenment sense of *critique* – that is expressions of oppositional thought, unveiling, debunking, of both the genre itself and the historical situation. As well as "critical" in the nuclear sense of the *critical mass* required to make the necessary explosive reaction. (Moylan 10)

It is this 'explosive reaction' in particular which most interests the critical utopianists. The critical utopianists believe that utopia *is* possible, but not in the form envisioned by those authors that came before them. For them, in order for utopias to work, they must be dynamic societies, open and willing to change:

> A central concern in the critical utopia is the awareness of the limitations of the utopian tradition, so that the texts reject utopia as a blueprint while preserving it as a dream. Furthermore, the novels dwell on the conflict between the originary world and the utopian society opposed to it so that the process of social change is more directly articulated. Finally, the novels focus on the continuing presence of difference and imperfection within utopian society itself and thus render more recognizable and dynamic alternatives. (Moylan 10-11)

More important for readers, as well as for this study, is that the critical utopia opens (or at least attempts to open) a space in which the individual can exist and even co-exist within the collective:

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[7] Moylan outlines the beginnings of critical utopianism in his work *Demand the Impossible*: "This new utopian phase began with Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (written in 1968 but not published until 1974) and continued on through Ursula LeGuin's *The Dispossessed*, Marge Piercy's *Woman on the edge of Time*, and Samuel Delany's *Triton*" (Moylan 41).

[8] Even critics, such as Ruth Levitas, who find some fault in Moylan's thesis, can not help but realize that "his argument remains important" (Levitas 174). Levitas takes issue with the fact that, in her eyes, Moylan's argument fails to address the problem of agency.

> In this reversal, then, the static nature of the utopian novel as well as the dead-end encountered by the mainstream realist novel is overcome. Readers once again find a human subject in action, now no longer an isolated individual monad stuck in one social system but rather a part of the human collective in a time and place of deep historical change. (Moylan 45)

Critical utopias attempt to bring together the 'I' and the 'We.'

Critical utopianists believe in attempting to bring together two, often disparate, entities in order to achieve utopia. In his work *Reader in a Strange Land*, however, Peter Ruppert introduces a third party, and asserts that the power of the critical utopia to effect change lies not in the text itself, but in the interaction between that text and the reader:

> Literary utopias...emphasize the reader's role as an active producer of meaning: they invite us to enter into a dialogue with the text and to formulate a meaning that may not be explicit in the text, but which grows out of the interplay between social fact and utopian dream. (6)

He goes on to say:

> To realize these potential effects of literary utopias we need to shift our attention from dogmatic utopian claims and solutions to the dialectical process that produces them. (21)

In other words, Ruppert believes that the true force of these utopias lies not in the details of their social structures but in their challenge to the reader to create, to respond. There is power within the utopian story, yet that power can only be realized when the reader is able to interpret and produce meaning for him or herself. Only when the reader, in fact, becomes a storyteller (a storyteller in that he or she shapes the story being told) does the possibility for utopia exists. It is in the written word, the story, that the power and possibility of utopia lies.

Interestingly enough, it is also in the written word, the story, that the power and the possibility for the individual to exist within utopia lies. My assertion is that language, in the form of both written and spoken word, and the subsequent manipulation of those forms of language, lies at the heart of all utopias. For, as we shall see, the manipulation of language in the form of mythmaking and storytelling is the key mechanism used in both negating and creating selfhood within utopia.

In the utopias that will be investigated in this thesis, those in power use myths and stories – the manipulation of language – in order to negate selfhood and individual thought, as individual thought is seen as threatening to the social fabric. And, as Bruce Lincoln outlines in *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, discourse is an extremely effective tool in the shaping of a desired society:

> Certain specific modes of discourse – myth, ritual, and classification – can be, and have been, employed as effective instruments not only for the replication of established social norms, but more broadly for the construction, destruction, and reconstruction of society itself. (3)

The governing elite of the utopian societies employ various forms of discourse in order to shape and maintain their utopian vision. As we shall see, however, those in power are not the only members of society who are capable of using and manipulating language in order to effect social change:

> Yet discourse can also serve some members of the subordinate classes in their attempts to demystify, delegitimate, and deconstruct the established norms, institutions, and discourses that play a role in constructing their subordination. (Lincoln 5)

Through the use of language – namely the telling of stories – these individuals not only attempt to effect social change, but also attempt to assert an authentic

self, becoming an 'I' amidst the massive, faceless 'We'. It is through storytelling that the individual is able to make his existence intelligible to himself and, in turn, define who he is. As Roger Schank explains:

> Storytelling and understanding are functionally the same thing...We tell stories to describe ourselves not only so others can understand who we are but also so we can understand ourselves. Telling stories allows us to compile our own personal mythology, and the collection of stories that we have compiled is, to some extent, who we are, what we have to say about the world. (24, 29)

In the above passage, Schank makes what is for me an interesting choice of diction and one that I feel is worth noting. He uses the words 'personal mythology' when describing the stories we tell. The word mythology here is quite apropos, as mythology is the original form of storytelling which has been passed on through the ages and informs all aspects of our lives.

In his book *Past and Present,* Meyer Reinhold outlines for us the importance of myth in the formation of ancient societies:

> Since myths were interpretations of the world told with poetic imagination, they actually formed part of the oral literature of early societies. Like a perceptive modern story teller or poet, the mythmaker captured in a memorable tale the essence of some significant experience or social pattern...In the same way, myths, repeated over and over again, helped produce social cohesiveness. (Reinhold 26)

Myths and storytelling, however, not only promoted social cohesiveness, but they also imbued the governing elite, as well as the society, with a sense of validity and authority:

> Through the retelling in story form what the group considered to be past precedents for current beliefs and social organization, the validity of the culture was reaffirmed, its values, social order and traditional modes of behaviour justified. (Reinhold 27)

Those who governed a given society recognized the latent power of mythmaking and storytelling to mould the society in which they lived, thus shaping the beliefs and ideologies of their people: "once created, myths survived because they quieted fears and sublimated antisocial tendencies. In this role they were a real force promoting solidarity and stability" (Reinhold 27). In light of this, it is not difficult to see where authors of utopian literature, and by extension, those who govern the societies they create between the covers of their books, learned how to shape society and manipulate people through the use of language.

What is interesting to note, and what originally piqued my interest in pursuing an investigation of the role of myth and storytelling as a means of identity formation within utopia, is that every major survey of utopian literature which I encountered likened utopia to myth and the mythmaking process:[9]

> In myth, and in fairy tale, the act of wishing is central. These genres express the longing of humanity for a better future. Even if such a longing is displaced into another time, another place, long long ago, in a Golden Age, or once upon a time – underlying the displacement is the wish for what has not yet been. (Moylan 23)

Similarly, Peter Ruppert in his work *Reader in a Strange Land*, describes what some theorists view as the 'therapeutic function' of utopian literature which is akin to that of myth:

> A...group of theorists has attributed to utopian literature a therapeutic effect that is similar to the function of myth. These critics emphasize the capacity of literary utopias to mediate or resolve, on the level of

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[9] See, for example, Lewis Mumford's *The Story of Utopia* in which he refers to utopias as "social myths" (193); Ruth Levitas's *The Concept of Utopia* in which she devotes an entire section to discussing myth and utopia; Northrop Frye's essay, "Varieties of Literary Utopias"; Tom Moylan's *Demand the Impossible*; and Peter Ruppert's *Reader in a Strange Land*.

> imagination, real cultural and social contradictions. The effect of this mediation is to help the reader cope more adequately in a complex and contradictory social world.[10] (Ruppert 16)

Northrop Frye makes a definite distinction between myth and utopia, saying that "the utopia is a *speculative* myth; it is designed to contain or provide a vision for one's social ideas, not to be a theory connecting social facts together" (Frye 25). For Frye, myths attempt to explain that which is, whereas utopian literature attempts to explain that which can be. Regardless of the distinction, it is clear that myth, mythmaking and utopia are still inextricably linked. It is for this reason that I believe it is important to investigate how myths and mythmaking inform both utopian literature, and the utopian societies which they present. It is here that I make my contribution to the study of utopian literature, as no critic has investigated this topic in any depth. I am in no way saying here that nobody has recognized the integral role of myth in utopia; however, no critic has addressed in depth how myth and stories, and the subsequent manipulation of those myths and stories by both those in power and those who are subordinate, lie at the heart of all utopian societies in the negation or creation of selfhood.

Using George Orwell's quintessential dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a frame of reference for the remainder of this study, the first chapter will explore the inherent danger of the utopian ideal which the anti-utopianists set out to expose. I will investigate the means by which the governing elite

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[10] The group of theorists to which Ruppert is referring are Northrop Frye, Alvin Toffler, and Georges Sorel, who argued that "ideas, in the form of myths, could potentially perform a mobilizing and transformative function" which he then compares with utopian literature (Levitas 59).

attempts to quell all forms of individual thought and expression, as individual thought and expression are seen as extremely threatening to the social fabric upon which the utopian vision is based. Specifically, in this chapter I will build primarily upon the work done by Lilian Feder and Michael Carter,[11] and investigate how the governing elite use and manipulate myths, stories and the written word for the purposes of the propaganda that keeps an ontological stranglehold on the inhabitants of Oceania. The individual, Winston Smith, then attempts to engage with, question, and thus interpret for himself the dominant myth and ideologies, as he attempts to use and manipulate language in order to assert an authentic selfhood.[12] Winston's attempt, however, is futile from the outset. Although he is able to recognize the latent power of myth and the written word in identity formation, he does not possess a forum from which to 'write himself a life.' His cries go unheard. Orwell's dystopia ends up just as reductive, restrictive, and stifling as the utopias he was attempting to critique.

The subsequent chapters, and the remainder of the study, will then explore how critical utopianists challenge the notion that it is impossible for true individual selfhood to exist within a utopian state. Sheri Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country* stands out as an excellent example and will be the focus of the second chapter. In her novel, Tepper grapples with what Carol S. Franko

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[11] Namely, Feder's article "Selfhood, Language, and Reality: George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four,"* and Carter's work, *George Orwell and the Problem of Authentic Existence.* In their works, both explore how "the use of language [is instrumental] in the act of self-creation" (Feder 392).

[12] I understand but do not want to get caught up in the intricacies of the discussion of selfhood and identity. Here the term 'authentic self' refers to an individual who is able to possess ontological freedom, one who is free to act as well as think for him or herself, to the extent that the individual feels they are able to act, relate, and contribute freely to his or her society on an individual level. One who is free to act both in conjunction with, or independent of, the general populace.

termed the "I-We dilemma" (76) – that is, whether "individuality and communality can coexist in a just society" (79). Just as with Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, myths, mythmaking and storytelling lie at the heart of Tepper's utopian vision. It is my assertion that in order to fully understand the aim of Tepper's work one must consider how myths and storytelling inform, not only the societies presented within the text, but also the actions of the inhabitants of those societies – specifically the protagonist Stavia. Tepper, however, although she desperately wants to believe in the possibility of utopia, remains divided at the end of her ambiguous text. This division manifests itself in Stavia. Stavia, unlike Winston, is able to interpret the myths she is told and discovers the truth about the society in which she lives. However, like Winston, she does not possess the ability to tell her own story and thus is a divided self.

It is not until the third chapter, with a discussion of Russell Hoban's post-apocalyptic *Riddley Walker*, that we see the marriage of interpreter and storyteller, and the latent power of the story to shape and define the existence of an individual. Riddley, unlike both of the other protagonists discussed within this thesis, is able to interpret stories and to tell stories, and is thus able to assert an authentic self. As we shall see, it is in the fruitless and barren landscape of *Riddley Walker* that the greatest potential for utopia lies.

The single commonality that exists between the three disparate utopian texts that I investigate in this thesis is their reliance upon myth, mythmaking and storytelling in terms of the societies presented, the characters involved, and the texts themselves. As we shall see, the power of language – both the spoken and written word – and subsequently, the manipulation of discourse are the key

mechanisms employed in utopian literature for the negation or creation of selfhood. If the possibility of a personal utopia exists, where the individual can truly *be*, it lies in the story – in those eternal words 'once upon a time'.

CHAPTER ONE

"Put me in a system and you negate me.
I am not just a mathematical symbol – I *am*."
- Kierkegaard[1]

Although Kierkegaard penned these words over a century prior to the publication of George Orwell's ominous, dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, his statement expresses the drive and desire of the novel's ill-fated protagonist, Winston Smith. There is one major difference, however, between Kierkegaard and Smith – Kierkegaard possessed a freedom of speech and a forum from which to write and publish these words, to define his selfhood, and to actually *be*. In Oceania however, the futurized world Orwell envisions, Winston does not have this luxury. His is a mute protest, a stifled cry for help – one he is unable to utter aloud – and in not being able to speak, he loses his sense of self.

The criticism concerning *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has been vast and varied from its publication, and the novel has always managed to elicit impassioned responses from those critiquing it. There have been three major lines of criticism – political, ideological, and what I will term 'stylistic.' When it first appeared in the 1940's at the start of the Cold War, the initial reaction of the critics was to take a political approach and many "American rightists hailed *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a vivid anticommunist manifesto" (Miller 695), an

[1] Quoted in Gorman Beauchamp's, "Of Man's Last Disobedience: Zamiatin's *We* and Orwell's *1984*," Critical Essays On George Orwell, Eds. Bernard Oldsey and Joseph Browne (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1986) 70.

"ideological superweapon in the cold war" (Deutscher 29).[2] This was a misreading however, one "that Orwell himself publicly repudiated" (Miller 695). Knowing this, other critics took a wide range of political positions, viewing *Nineteen Eighty-Four* "as a defense of bourgeois society" (Feder 392), as a "critique of Marxist-Leninist ideology" (Meyer 124), and as "a document of dark disillusionment not only with Stalinism but with every form and shade of Socialism" (Deutscher 35). Since then, and somewhat more appropriately, it has been read by critics such as Mark Crispin Miller as a treatise on the dangers of totalitarianism, and the totalitarian impulse in general:

> Thus the object of Orwell's horrific satire is not any one totalitarian regime, but a necessary modern urge that has indirectly brought about all modern tyrannies, whether of the left or right, whether centralized or pluralistic. (700)[3]

Lilian Feder is right to point out, however, that "some of these interpretations now seem dated...[because] they reflect political alliances of a certain period in history" (392) - the Cold War, and more significantly, the year 1984, have come and gone. Moreover, although many of these criticisms provide valuable insights, oftentimes strictly political readings fail to recognize the intricacies of Orwell's work. Focusing too heavily on the collective, political makeup of Oceania, these readings do not fully explore the true focus of the novel, the plight and ideological struggle of the individual – namely, Winston Smith.

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[2] One such critic was Lionel Trilling who, in "Orwell on the Future", exclaimed: "By now it *must* be clear that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is, in large part, an attack on Soviet Communism" (27).

[3] See, for example, Erika Gottlieb's *The Orwell Conundrum*, in which she asserts that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is "a political allegory directed against totalitarianism" (63), and Julian Symons "Power and Corruption." For a particularly thorough political utopian reading, see Robert Paul Resch's "Utopia, Dystopia, and the Middle Class in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*" in which he explores what he terms, "Orwell's democratic socialism" (138).

The second major line of criticism, ideological criticism, builds upon these previous political readings. However, with critics realising that the major conflict in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is not political, but rather, ideological, the focus of criticism is shifted from the totalitarian regime to the effect the totalitarian regime has upon individuality.[4] In "Power of Images/Images of Power in *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four,*" for example, Mario Varricchio argues that the ruling party uses media to "perform a crucial political function by preventing and repressing protest" and that "the media uphold conformity, denying individuals their own privacy and personal feelings" (98). Although Varricchio's argument, and others like his are both enlightening and persuasive, they only examine the issue from the top down – the effect of the State upon the individual. In a book so completely preoccupied with the futile struggle of a single individual as *1984* is, I feel it is imperative that one examine how and why that individual feels compelled to fight indoctrination in an attempt to assert his authentic self.

Perhaps it is an unwillingness on the part of certain critics to fully confront the political and ideological ramifications of Orwell's dystopia that spawned the third line of criticism, what I term 'stylistic criticism'. Although these readings do recognize the impact the novel has had, they gloss over themes and messages, dismissing the novel, focusing on Orwell's (in)ability as a writer. Daphne Patai is one such critic and, "in *The Orwell Mystique*, agrees

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[4] See, for example, Mark Crispin Miller's "Big Brother is You, Watching," Mark Connelly's *The Diminished* Self, G.E. Burkowski's "The Individual in *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four,*" and Basia Miller Gulati's "Orwell's *Nineteen-Eighty Four*: Escape From Doublethink."

with Steinhoff and Slater on the significance of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*...but argues as well that Orwell's pessimism and final despair render it flawed" (Gottleib 2).[5] Isaac Deutscher is not so sympathetic, however, calling it "the work of an intense and concentrated, but also fear-ridden and restricted imagination," saying that the "story unfolds like the plot of a science-fiction film of the cheaper variety," and that, "Orwell lacks the richness and subtlety of thought...of the great satirist" (30).[6] Howe illuminates for us what certain critics view as the biggest flaw of Orwell's work: "Another complaint that one often hears is that there are no credible 'three-dimensional' characters in the book" (43). Some, like Leslie Fiedler, even refer to them as "cardboard characters" (qtd. in Gottleib 1). I would argue, however, that, as the products of an extreme utopia in which personality and individuality have ceased to exist, Orwell's characters purposely lack dimension. At the beginning of the text Winston *is* a one-dimensional character, but that is because he is a character on a journey, one that is attempting to figure out what it means to be authentically 'human.' For this reason it seems simplistic to argue that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* simply illuminates the horrors of totalitarianism or that Orwell's characters lack depth.

The major struggle of the novel is ideological and centres on one man's ontological struggle against a regime that is hell-bent on closing all avenues of self-definition. As we shall see, this is accomplished through the manipulation

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[5]For a more thorough discussion of stylistically critical responses to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* see Erika Gottleib's *The Orwell Conundrum*.

[6] Similar to Deutscher, Pritchett believes that Orwell's writing style verges on "monotony [and] nagging" (20).

of language. Lilian Feder, who provides what is for me one of the most thorough and insightful readings of Orwell's dystopia, agrees and also takes issue with previous criticism: "[The novel] does not simply satirize a totalitarian state...its continuous prophetic meaning lies in its revelation of the individual's biological and psychological resistance to his own adaptation to political and social constraints" (Feder 393), and she investigates "the use of language in the act of self-creation" (392).[7] Feder does not, however, place her argument within the context of utopian literature, and it is my assertion that the concept of selfhood within Utopia in particular lies at the heart of Winston's ontological struggle. I am therefore building upon and expanding the work done by Feder, investigating the means by which utopian states are created and maintained through storytelling, the manipulation of language and how Winston attempts to reclaim and authenticate his existence through the use of language. The manipulation of language is one of the central mechanisms employed in Oceania and all utopian literature to either negate or create selfhood.

What may not be apparent to some readers is that, in the strictest sense of the term, Oceania is, in fact, a utopian state – one that attempts to "reorder society into a more harmonious, efficient whole" (Beauchamp 66). In the name

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[7] Similarly, in *George Orwell and the Problem of Authentic Existence*, Michael Carter is interested in what happens when "[man] faces in solitude the extinction of his individual possibilities" (178), and provides a highly theoretical reading of the construction of the self within the text. Also see George McKay's "Metapropaganda: Self-Reading Dystopian Fiction." In this article McKay looks at "particular political texts – novels – and at the ways in which their narratives focus on the effects of political texts on readers" (302) – the role of reading "in constituting the self" (303). What his reading fails to do, however (although he does mention it briefly), is investigate the role of *writing* in the formation of the self. Given that the novel opens with Winston deciding to write in a diary I feel the act of writing is a central issue at the heart of Orwell's work and one that must be addressed.

of 'efficiency', however, Oceania has become static and totalitarian, where "three hundred million people all [have] the same face" (Orwell 77), and if the Party leaders wish it to be so, "2+2=5" (303). It is a society in which, since the revolution, through a rigorous programme that includes endless propaganda and the manipulation and erasure of the past, the inhabitants are forced to capitulate to the will of The Party. Deprived of all points of self-reference, their sense of selfhood is utterly negated – as individuals they cease to exist. The Party carries out this rigorous programme in the name of stability, because "individuality leads to independence of thought and independence of thought leads to a desire for change" (Burkowski 38). The Party, only too aware of this fact, turns to various forms of discourse, such as ritual, mythmaking, and storytelling, in order to indoctrinate the masses and ensure the efficacy of their system.

In *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, Bruce Lincoln illuminates the central function ritual, myth, and storytelling have in the construction of society:

> Certain specific modes of discourse – myth, ritual, and classification – can be, and have been, employed as effective instruments not only for the replication of established social forms, but more broadly for the construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of society itself. (3)

Perhaps more interesting, however, is how these forms of discourse are subsequently used in order to maintain the status quo, hide social inequities and consolidate power:

> Discourse of all forms – not only verbal, but also the symbolic discourses of spectacle, gesture, costume, edifice, icon, musical performance, and the like – may be strategically employed to mystify the inevitable inequities of any social order and to win the consent of those over whom

> power is exercised, thereby obviating the need for direct coercive use of force and transforming simple power into 'legitimate' authority. (4)

Telescreens and the daily Two Minutes Hate are prime examples of how The Party uses discourse – both verbal and symbolic discourses of ritual and spectacle – in order to legitimate their authority and to 'mystify' (or brainwash) the masses.

The telescreen, similar in design to what we would call a television, is an ever-present feature in Oceania. Telescreens are placed in both private homes and public places and they continuously transmit Party propaganda from which citizens cannot escape: "the instrument...could be dimmed, but there was no way of shutting it off completely" (Orwell 4). What this incessant transmission effectively does is constantly bombard the inhabitants with information, causing them to be unable to fully process that information, making them believe whatever they hear. What's more, the telescreen not only transmits but also receives simultaneously, and "any sound that Winston made, above the level of a very low whisper, would be picked up by it; moreover, so long as he remained within the field of vision...he could be seen as well as heard" (4), further ensuring that inhabitants do not act against party dictates. As with the endless transmission of Party propaganda, constant surveillance renders the members of the Party unable to think. People have "to live – did live, from habit that became instinct – in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinized" (5). Party members are reduced to an animalistic, instinctual existence, as they are deprived of the one thing that distinguishes human beings from animals – the

ability to reason. Without the ability to reason, members of the outer party are unable to question party practices and simply become a compliant mass of faceless individuals.

The Party's mass indoctrination of individuals also relies heavily on the ritualistic practice of the 'Two Minutes Hate.' The Two Minutes Hate is a propaganda reel that extols the omnipotent figurehead of The Party, Big Brother, while defaming The Party's nemesis, Goldstein. It occurs daily, and all party members must participate; however, "the horrible thing about the Two Minutes Hate was not that one was obliged to act a part, but that it was impossible to avoid joining in" (16). The Hate is designed to make sure "the spectator's emotional involvement is complete, while all critical attitude is absent" (Varricchio 98): "Partly it was a sort of hymn to the wisdom and majesty of Big Brother, but still more it was an act of self-hypnosis, a deliberate drowning of consciousness by means of rhythmic noise" (Orwell 18-19). Such phenomena, argues Maurice Bloch, a leading scholar of ritual, "are characterized first by severely attenuated parameters of discourse and second by thought categories that, being socially determined, render criticism of society quite impossible," because they are "already moulded to fit what is to be criticized" (qtd. in Lincoln 5-6). Through ritual and the bombardment of propagandist language, The Party halts the individual's thought process before it can even begin, all in the name of maintaining the stability of its 'utopian' vision.

Interestingly enough, it is in fact a large face that helps the leaders of Oceania to maintain an ontological stranglehold on the population. From the

outset, the novel is dominated by a single icon – the face of Big Brother, the omnipotent leader of The Party:

> At one end of [the hallway was] a coloured poster, too large for indoor display, [that] had been tacked to the wall. It depicted simply an enormous face, more than a metre wide: the face of a man of about forty-five, with a heavy black moustache and ruggedly handsome features...It was one of those pictures which are so contrived that the eyes follow you about when you move. BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU, the caption beneath it ran. (Orwell 3)

In *George Orwell and the Problem of Authentic Existence*, Michael Carter provides a particularly insightful reading regarding the role of the icon of Big Brother in the negation of selfhood:

> The domination of the self through the ubiquitous slogan 'BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU' compares with Sartre's notion of the Look as the most basic and prevalent form of tyranny. To suddenly be aware that I am being watched by another is to experience the loss of myself and my world, for under the Look of the Other I experience myself as having an outside, an objective form which takes its place among the things of the world. As an object, I lose my sense of freedom and subjectivity. No longer an organizing consciousness always at the centre of the world, I become an item in the perceptual field of the Other. My point of view ceases to be the definitive perspective on reality. (180)

The definitive, and *only*, perspective on reality permitted in Oceania is that of The Party. In being endlessly observed, the observed inevitably becomes dispossessed. Moreover, "The Inner Party, as the foundation of power, is hidden, purely subjective; no one...can reciprocate the Look of the Inner, so therefore, their enslaved objectivity is maintained" (Carter 181). Thus, through psychological manipulation via the use of the symbolic discourses of spectacle, ritual, and icon, The Party makes it impossible for the individual to tell his own story and assert his selfhood. He is unable to author his own story because he

is objectified – already a character in the story of someone else, one who is manipulated by 'the author.'

This brings us to what is perhaps The Party's greatest weapon in its assault on individualism – the destruction and manipulation of the written word. The ability to use language to express oneself is absolutely essential to an individual's sense of identity because, "it's as if nothing has happened until an event is made explicit in language" (Schank 115). As a result, The Party fastidiously refines language, creating *Newspeak*, a means of communication that is in perfect compliance with party dictates. While talking with Syme, "one of the enormous team of experts now engaged in compiling the Eleventh Edition of the Newspeak Dictionary" (Orwell 51), Winston soon discovers that this 'creation' of a new language is not at all an act of genesis; it is quite the opposite – it is an act of destruction: "You think, I dare say, that our chief job is inventing new words. But not a bit of it! We're destroying words – scores of them...We're cutting the language down to the bone" (Orwell 53-54). That Orwell wishes his readers to fully understand the frightening implications of this act as well as the dark side of The Party's utopian ideal is undeniable. Shortly after Syme explains to Winston what The Party is doing, he explicitly explains to Winston *why* The Party is doing it: "Don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make *thoughtcrime* literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it" (55). Eerily, this statement sounds like Orwell directly addressing his reader. Thus, individual thought is systematically eradicated "by altering language so that intellectual rebellion can have no medium, no method of

expression or communication" (Connelly 29). The refining of Newspeak takes the mental conditioning achieved by the Two Minutes Hate one step further, for, as Newspeak is continually refined, the individual will not even be able to formulate a subversive thought, for the words to do so will not even exist.

The Party's manipulation of the written word does not simply end with the refining of language. Written documents such as newspapers, pamphlets, and books are also manipulated, being continually destroyed or altered to suit the political aims of The Party:

> As soon as all the corrections which happened to be necessary in any particular number of the *Times* had been assembled and collated, that number would be reprinted, the original copy destroyed, and the corrected copy placed on the files in its stead. This process of continuous alteration was applied not only to newspapers, but to books, periodicals, pamphlets, posters, leaflets...to every kind of literature or documentation which might conceivably hold any political or ideological significance. Day by day and almost minute by minute the past was brought up to date. (Orwell 42)

As Mark Connelly explains: "Rather than adapting to historical trends and events, trends and events are invented to suit the goals of the Party" (50). It is Winston, however, who elucidates the darkest implications for the reader: "The past, he reflected, has not merely been altered, it had been actually destroyed. For how could you establish even the most obvious fact when there existed no record outside your own memory" (Orwell 38). To complicate matters further, The Party even attempts to control the memory process of individuals via *Doublethink* – "a denial of reality while taking account of the reality which one

denies" (Feder 396).[8] Thus, "history has stopped. Nothing exists except an endless present in which the Party is always right" (Orwell 162). An endless present is so terrifying because it gives the Party absolute power, for,

> If all others accepted the lie which the Party imposed – if all records told the same tale – then the lie passed into history and became truth. 'Who controls the past,' ran the Party slogan, 'controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.' (Orwell 37)

With the erasure of the past as well as the erasure of the concept of history, the individual ceases to exist (quite literally if the party wishes). As Connelly explains:

> Robbed of his reference points, the self has no touchstones to the real world...to history. His range of observation limited, he has no more ability to make sense of the world than the serf of the Dark Ages who knew only his village and had only church doctrine to explain the universe. (50)

Existing in a continual present, with no past or concept of history to build from, the individual is unable to assert his selfhood; he is unable to logically order his experience as temporality ceases to exist. The Party seems to be in complete control. Not everything in Oceania is absolute, however, and despite official policy that is "calculated to distort or destroy memory by such means as omnipresent slogans, frequent alterations in reports of recent events, and the obliteration or falsification of historical records," The Party realizes that some inhabitants have a 'defective' memory, and "remnants of the past do

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[8] *Doublethink* is a Newspeak word meaning 'reality control' (Orwell 37). It is explained by Winston as "To know and not know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully-constructed lies, to hold simultaneously two opinions which cancelled out, knowing them to be contradictory and believing in both of them; to use logic against logic." It is "consciously to induce unconsciousness, and then, once again, to become unconscious of the act of hypnosis you had just performed. Even to understand the world [sic] 'doublethink' involved the use of doublethink" (37-38).

return" (Feder 399). Linked with this, and even more threatening to the Party's utopian vision is that, as with personal memories, the processes of self-creation "do continue, forbidden and unbidden" (398).

Winston Smith is one such individual – and he knows that the squalor in which he lives is not always the way things had been. The problem is, "the only evidence to the contrary was the mute protest in your own bones, in the instinctive feeling that the conditions that you lived in were intolerable and that at some other time they must have been different" (Orwell 76-77). It is this instinctual feeling, coupled with vague fragments of the past that keep resurfacing in Winston's dreams and memories, which drives him to act against the Party. Unable to utter his cries of protest aloud however, Winston, in a move reminiscent of Party practice, turns to discourse of a different kind, the written word, in an attempt to effect social change. As Bruce Lincoln outlines in *Discourse and the Construction of Society,*

> Discourse can also serve members of subordinate classes in their attempts to demystify, delegitimate, and deconstruct the established norms, institutions, and discourses that play a role in constructing their subordination. (5)

If such a struggle is to be undertaken at all, however, several specific requirements must be satisfied:

> Such criticism [of society] – and the contingent potential for social change – becomes possible only through thought and discourse that originate within a nonritual sphere, where they are shaped by something other than society and thus afford an objective, nonmystified perspective that allows one to talk *about* society and not just *within* it. (6)

Winston Smith does have a 'nonritualized' space – the alcove in his apartment at Victory Mansions: "By sitting in the alcove, and keeping well back, Winston

was able to remain outside the range of the telescreen, so far as sight went" (Orwell 7). He has a space in which he is 'free' – free to think at least. Winston, however, realizes that thinking is not enough; the only way to challenge the reality carefully constructed by the Party is to make *his* reality known. He comes to "sense, almost by instinct, that his only way of resisting mental control and the threat of insanity is to find a fixed point in the ocean of lies" (Gottleib 88). Thus, Winston purchases a blank book at Charrington's antique shop and starts a diary in an attempt to stop the "interminable restless monologue that had been running inside his head" (Orwell 9). Just as the Party manipulates language to negate individuality, Winston unconsciously turns to language in an attempt to create an authentic self.

When Winston first begins his diary, however, he is unsure as to what he wishes to accomplish through the act of writing and even, "for whom, it suddenly occurred to him to wonder, was he writing this diary?" (Orwell 9). Initially, all Winston is conscious of is that he is committing an extremely subversive political act – one that could be "punished by death" (8). Mark Crispin Miller, however, does not agree that Winston's actions are entirely subversive in intention:

> [Winston's] very efforts to escape or combat the party become themselves proof of his inviolable membership. In starting a diary, he deliberately commits what is probably a capital offense against the Party; and yet the first result of this dissident gesture is an effusion of perfect orthodoxy; enthusiastic praise for an atrocious war film seen the night before. (705-706)

Yet, as Miller himself points out, this is Winston's *first* result of attempting to write. Viewed in the context of storytelling and identity formation, Winston's

initial musings are an essential first step. In order to begin to write, and by extension, to begin to define and assert his selfhood, Winston must start with writing about what he knows. In a world where history is obsolete and the past does not exist, all that one is certain of in Oceania is the effusion of Party propaganda. That Orwell wants his reader to be aware of the subversive political nature of Winston's action is unmistakeable. As Winston muses over his diary, he surprisingly discovers that he has repeatedly written four simple, but potentially destructive words:

DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER
DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER
DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER
DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER
DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER
(Orwell 20).

Therefore, what Miller sees as Winston's initial, seemingly 'orthodox' perfusions have developed into unmistakeable anti-Party propaganda.

The simple slogan, DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER, contains a latent political force, one which, if it was ever discovered by The Party, would have to be immediately eradicated if they wished to maintain the status quo. As Bruce Lincoln clarifies:

> It is clear that [slogans are a] means to catalyze a latent revolutionary movement. That is, by giving voice to the deeply felt but officially unacknowledged aspirations of those who are marginalized under existing social structures, even the tiniest party can mobilize a large, unified, and active following. (Lincoln 18)

This is why Winston and the latent power of the written word pose such a threat to the stability of The Party. Through the power of language even the

tiniest group, even a minority of one, can effect great social change. Winston, himself, is aware of this fact, for:

> Once in his life he had possessed – *after* the event: that was what counted – concrete, unmistakeable evidence of an act of falsification. He had held it between his fingers as long as thirty seconds...It was enough to blow the party to atoms, if in some way it could have been published to the world and its significance made known.[9] (Orwell 78, 82)

A simple scrap of paper possesses the power to undermine the 'reality' carefully constructed by the Party and to prove to Winston that he is not insane. Of course, the piece of evidence is never made public, but in writing those four words, DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER, Winston wishes to effect social change. More important to his struggle, however, is that, whether consciously or unconsciously, by committing the decisive political act of beginning a journal, Winston takes the first step toward becoming an authentic individual. By going against party dictates and irrevocably marking the page, Winston begins to define his selfhood. He begins to define himself in opposition to The Party. Winston begins to know who he is and what he believes by knowing, and documenting, what he does not believe.

This act of self-documentation and its narration of events allow Winston to reclaim another process integral to the formation of selfhood, namely, an individual, historical consciousness, as "narration has an essential temporal dimension...[it] imposes structure; it connects as well as records" (Nash 131). Writing enables Smith to "assert his being-in-time" so as to arrest The Party's

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[9] Ten years prior, Winston had destroyed a dated photograph from the *Times* at his job at the Ministry of Truth. The picture was of three alleged traitors taken at a Party function in New York on a day when, in a forced confession, they said they were in Eurasia and not in Oceania at all.

"tyrannical concept of a perpetual present" (Carter 184). Although Winston is uncertain of the 'true' date, simply by marking the page with the "small clumsy letters...April 4th, 1984" (9), he anchors himself temporally within society, and in effect, comes into being. As previously discussed, Winston's act is punishable by death, and, as a result, Winston is only too aware that he will inevitably be sought out and exterminated by the Thought Police – all Winston can do is wait. It is this fact which anchors Winston in time and imbues his life with a sense of temporality: "As one whose life is dominated by a sense of waiting, he assumes the temporality which [The Party] denies. By authenticating himself, Smith becomes futurized. With the marking of the page, the clock begins to tick" (Carter 184). Moreover, it gives Winston's life a purpose: "Now that he recognized himself as a dead man it became important to stay alive as long as possible" (Orwell 30). The beginning of a diary not only restores Winston's sense of a future time, but it also enables him to recover all three dimensions of time – future, present *and* past. As Michael Carter explains in *George Orwell and the Problem of Authentic Existence*:

> Smith restores the time of the past by appropriating an old book, establishes temporal succession by recording dated events, and, because such acts are punishable by death, he realizes the future in the mode of anticipation. Smith, therefore, through an authentic act, has acquired a sense of mineness and recovered the three dimensions of time. (184)

It is only when Winston anchors himself temporally through the use of language that he can assert an authentic self; he is now able to order his experience. As a result, Winston can begin to clarify the childhood memories – a "series of bright-lit tableaux, occurring against no background and mostly unintelligible" (Orwell 5) – that have continually haunted him.

In light of this, let us reconsider Winston's first entry, which Mark Crispin Miller believes is nothing more than an effusion of pure orthodoxy. What becomes apparent is that, although Winston's first ramblings may seem to simply uphold the ideology of the Party, they are far more important than Miller is willing to acknowledge. It is not what Winston says that is important. What *is* important is the act of writing itself, which becomes the means through which Winston discovers an avenue of expression that in turn opens the gateway to the repressed memories that will help him to define who he is: "He did not know what made him pour out this stream of rubbish. But the curious thing was that while he was doing so a totally different memory had clarified itself in his mind, to the point where he almost felt equal to writing it down" (Orwell 11). As Lilian Feder says in *Selfhood, Language, and Reality*:

> Putting words on paper – even the formulas of repression – stimulates memories of the motivations for writing itself, a repressed hunger to experience and re-create the remnants of individual and social history that have outlasted the ravages of totalitarianism. (409)

The more Winston writes in his journal, the more his memories come back to him and the more he is able to define who he *is*, because he begins to understand who he *was*. A prime example of this is the memories Winston has concerning the death of his mother. At the outset of the novel, Winston believes that he is responsible for his mother's death and that "she had sacrificed herself" to save her son (Orwell 32). As Winston writes and reflects, however, he comes to realize that his mother's demise was carried out at the hands of the Party.

Winston's ability to recall and clarify memories, such as the one concerning his mother, made possible through the act of writing, is paramount to his development toward becoming an autonomous individual, as personal memories are a fundamental component in the shaping of an individual's identity. Roger Schank illuminates the reasons why in his book *Tell Me a Story*:

> The experiences we do remember form a set of stories that constitute our view of the world and characterize our beliefs. In some sense, we may not even know what our own view of the world is until we are reminded of and tell stories that illustrate our opinion on some aspect of the world. (29)

Schank calls our attention to two important factors: first, the individual must be reminded of stories (which Winston is) but secondly, and more importantly, the individual must be able to tell his or her story. However, in a repressive society such as Oceania, Winston is unable to communicate his thoughts with anyone. This is why he feels compelled to turn to the written word and start the diary, because, even though "he was a lonely ghost uttering a truth that nobody would ever hear...so long as he uttered it, in some obscure way the continuity was not broken" (Orwell 30). To have a forum from which to express himself is more important to Winston than the fear of death, so "he went back to the table, dipped his pen, and wrote" (30). Memory then, as Feder is right to point out, "provides the only knowledge available, the only valid psychological preparation for apprehending present reality and for experiencing his own existence as authentic" (Feder 400). And it is the writing process that helps stir up in Winston authentic memories of his past prior to the revolution - memories which he writes down, in an attempt to make his past concrete and immutable.

Inextricably linked to Winston's attempt to write himself back into history and make his past concrete is his desire to possess artefacts from the time before the revolution. As Feder points out: "Knowing that 'suicidal impulses' lead him back to the shop, he goes nonetheless to discover fragments of the past which stimulate his memory and his desires" (402). More than this, however, these remnants of the past, like starting a diary, serve as touchstones for Winston, authentic relics from the past, which help legitimate his seemingly futile quest. It is at Mr. Charrington's Antique shop that Winston first hears the opening lines to an old rhyme about the church bells of London:

> *'Oranges and lemons,' say the bells of St. Clement's,*
> *'You owe me three farthings,' say the bells of St. Martin's.* (Orwell 102)

As soon as Winston hears the lines of this rhyme he becomes enchanted by it and is unable to rest until the remaining lines emerge by degrees. It is more than just a simple rhyme from a nonexistent era, however. The rhyme causes the sound of the bells to actually ring for Winston, connecting him with "a time when there was still privacy, love and friendship" (32): "It was curious, but when you said it to yourself you had the illusion of actually hearing bells, the bells of a lost London that still existed somewhere or other" (103). Through the rhyme, Winston attempts to reconstruct a landscape in which to anchor, and further clarify, his past experiences and memories.

That Winston wishes to 'anchor' himself within the ever-mutable world of Big Brother is undeniable. Upon his first visit back to the shop, Smith is immediately drawn to a paperweight that he feels he must possess. It is a piece of coral encased in glass. In *George Orwell: A Study in Ideology and Literary*

Form, Carl Freedman recognizes that the paperweight is of great symbolic import for Winston:

> Perhaps the most prominent symbolic detail in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a paperweight. Simply a bit of coral embedded in a hemisphere of glass, which, for Winston and the reader, comes to stand for the relative freedom of an archaic past when merely beautiful objects could be tolerated. (132-133)

Freedman's interpretation, however, seems misguided, for, "what appealed to [Winston] about it was not so much its beauty as the air it seemed to possess of belonging to an age quite different from the present one" (Orwell 99). Once again, it is an artefact that authenticates the past, an artefact that enables Winston to further solidify his sense of selfhood. Moreover, through the symbol of the paperweight, Orwell wishes to make clear to his reader that Winston's writing and his fanatical search for remnants of the past are inextricably linked, as the paperweight will quite literally hold Winston's marked pages in place, further solidifying his sense of self.

The paperweight also comes to metaphorically represent the world Winston and Julia create for themselves in the room on the upper floor of Charrington's shop: "The paperweight was the room he was in, and the coral was Julia's life and his own, fixed in a sort of eternity at the heart of the crystal" (Orwell 154). The room above Charrington's shop symbolized by the paperweight becomes a haven for Winston and Julia: "there were times when they had the illusion not only of safety but of permanence. So long as they were actually in this room, they both felt, no harm could come to them" (158). The word 'illusion' in the above passage, however, is a telling one, and one, no doubt, carefully chosen by Orwell. The sense of permanence which Winston

feels does not exist. The paperweight does not represent the 'relative freedom' of Winston and Julia as Freedman suggests; rather, it is indicative, just as the room is, of how confined and trapped they actually are, just as the coral is trapped within the crystal. Moreover, the paperweight is indicative of the relative fragility of the selfhood Winston attempts to create for himself. This is confirmed when Winston and Julia are turned over to the Party by Charrington, who is actually a member of the Thought Police. As Julia and Winston are surrounded by members of the Thought Police, "someone...picked up the glass paperweight from the table and smashed it to pieces on the hearth stone" (232). Winston's rebellion is over, no hope remains, and in an instant his selfhood is shattered. To be brought to the Ministry of Love and 'reprogrammed' is all that remains for Winston.

Interestingly enough, it is, once again, the Party's manipulation of the written word that precipitates the demise of Winston Smith, and, as McKay rightly asserts: "For a society that is intent (hell-bent, even) on destroying narrative...Oceania remains remarkably narrative-centred, even in its traps" (309). It is only after Winston reads Goldstein's book, *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*, that his dissidence is fully confirmed by the Thought Police and he is sought out and exterminated at Charrington's shop.[10] What is interesting to note is that, even though the book ends up causing Winston's downfall, it is in Winston's reaction to *The Book* that we see exactly how integral the act of written expression is to self-definition. Simply by being

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[10] For an in depth analysis of Goldstein's book, see George McKay's "Metapropaganda: Self-Reading in Dystopian Fiction."

able to read the book, Winston becomes energized in his fight and more centred as a person:

> The book fascinated him, or more exactly it reassured him. In a sense it told him nothing that was new, but that was part of the attraction. It said what he would have said, if it had been possible for him to set his scattered thoughts in order. (Orwell 208)

It is after reading *The Book* that Winston understands that his struggle is not futile and that he must continue his attempt to assert an autonomous selfhood in the face of a repressive social structure. He must effect social change and he must continue to write. For this reason, however, The Party must step in and 'vaporize' Winston Smith; individuality must be exterminated at all costs to maintain the utopian vision of Oceania.

In the Ministry of Love, before his mental processes are reprogrammed, Winston learns from O'Brien the full extent of the horror that characterizes the socio-political practices of The Party. Here the reader also learns how far The Party will go to maintain their utopian vision in the name of stability. Perhaps the thing that most disheartens Winston (besides room 101), is that Goldstein's book, the book which gives Winston hope for the future, is a complete fabrication of the Party that was co-authored by O'Brien, because, "no book is produced individually" (274). Consequently, everything Winston thought he believed begins to fall out from under him, and he loses once again any sense of permanence, any sense of self; this is exactly what the party wishes to accomplish. That the "aim of the torture is the destruction of the self is unquestionable" (Feder 403). O'Brien says explicitly to Winston: "It is impossible to see reality except by looking through the eyes of the Party. That

is the fact that you have got to relearn, Winston. It needs an act of self-destruction" (Orwell 261). And, as Lincoln explains, Winston's final and ultimate loss of self is inextricably linked to his inability to find an avenue of self-expression that can effect social change. It is linked to his inability to tell his story:

> There is the question of whether a disruptive discourse can gain a hearing, that is, how widely and effectively it can be propagated; this largely depends on the ability of its propagators *to gain access and exploit* the opportunities inherent within varied channels of communication. (8; emphasis mine).

Winston's writing, however, never gains a hearing; the Party closes the channels of communication to him. Consequently, he loses hope and faith in himself which is one of the key reasons, along with incessant torture, that Winston's struggle comes to an end. Winston's self is extinguished, his conversion complete: "He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother" (311).

The appendix to the novel, which explains the "principles of Newspeak" (312), reinforces our sense of the dangers of the totalitarian mission of the Party. Certain critics do not agree, however, and based on the appendix, which they see as Orwell's true utopian vision, "have optimistically concluded that the power of the Party will collapse some time after the year 1984" (Sanderson 588). One such critic is Robert Paul Resch, who asserts that:

> The existence of a utopian frame is both the most interesting and frequently overlooked feature of *1984*. It exists as the post-totalitarian world of the 'author' whose footnote, early in the first chapter, serves to inform us that we are reading a historical novel written some time after the demise of Oceania, and whose appendix...takes the form of a scholarly monograph looking back on Oceania as an extinct and almost incomprehensible society... [which] asserts that a revolutionary overthrow of totalitarianism has taken place. (158)

As much as I would like to agree with Resch's assertion, ultimately it is overly optimistic. As Sanderson rightly asserts, the appendix actually reinforces the reader's belief that "within a totalitarian world, 'objective truth' does not exist" (588). Moreover, as Feder argues, it "extends the implications of Winston Smith's defeat in his effort to reclaim vestiges of his individuality, for it deals explicitly with...the increasing evidence of the devaluation of selfhood in the deterioration of language" (406). Even if Winston's journal does miraculously survive and acts as the basis for the 'author's' historical book, this does not mean that Winston is transformed into an authentic self. Unable to make his thoughts known to the inhabitants of Oceania while he is alive – unable to tell his story – Winston Smith, at the end of the novel, dies a broken, *selfless* man.

In *Nineteen Eighty Four*, George Orwell goes to great lengths to illustrate the latent power within language to either create or negate selfhood. The Party uses and manipulates language to consolidate all aspects of their social control. More importantly, they deny individuals access to any forum from which to use language against the Party, an integral component of self-formation:

> The fact is there can be no conception of reality without the experience of Selfhood, and language is the most basic of instruments mediating between individual biological and psychological demands and the internalization of external nature and society. (Feder 408)

This process of negating selfhood must be carried out by the Party, as individuality and individual thought destabilize Oceanic society. As O'Brien says to Winston:

> Can you not understand Winston, that the individual is only a cell? The weariness of the cell is the vigour of the organism...The first thing that you must realize is that power is collective. The individual only has

> power in so far as he ceases to be an individual...[Therefore,] alone – free – the human being is always defeated. It must be so, because every human being is doomed to die, which is the greatest of all failures. (276-277)

The members of the Inner Party are creating what they see as utopia. It is a utopia, however, that "is the exact opposite of the stupid hedonistic Utopias that the old reformers imagined" (279). It is a utopia centred around the collective, one founded on carefully constructed lies and the manipulation of language – a utopia in which the individual *cannot* exist.

Orwell's book, then, is the antithesis of the idealistic utopias written before the twentieth century. It ominously exposes to the reader the inherent dangers associated with the degradation of language and the utopian drive itself. The danger of achieving utopia, for Orwell and other early twentieth-century dystopian writers, is that the individual is exterminated. Utopia for Orwell is an impossible dream, for if a single individual is not content, the society is not a perfect utopia. We shall see, however, by turning to works written later in the twentieth century, such as Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country* and Hoban's *Riddley Walker*, that all do not share Orwell's pessimism. There is a recent trend in utopian literature which focuses more on the potential of the individual within utopia, a potential, as we have seen, that seems to lie in the individual's ability to tell his or her own story.

CHAPTER TWO

"Even though Women's Country now sometimes seemed very solid to [Septimius], with observable permanencies about it, he still stayed alert, sensing hidden currents, a fluid flow, with trickery and deceit swimming beneath the surface."
-*The Gate to Women's Country* (161)

George Orwell's dystopia, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and other dystopias like his,[1] first made clear to readers that oftentimes what constitutes 'utopia' is, at best, ambiguous, and the laws and ideals governing a utopian state are undeniably subjective. Consequently, what society deems 'ideal' is not necessarily so for the individual and, as a result, individuality is compromised in the name of the 'common good'. Thus, dystopias such as George Orwell's raise the question: Is any attempt of achieving selfhood within utopia, and achieving utopia itself, rendered futile from the outset? Utopia is, after all, both a 'good place' and a 'no place' – it does not exist – but does that necessarily mean it cannot exist?

In her much overlooked critical utopia, *The Gate to Women's Country*, Sheri S. Tepper probes this very question – she explores the duality of utopianism. *The Gate to Women's Country* confronts, and grapples with, what

[1] See, for example, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and Eugene Zamiatin's *We*.

Carol S. Franko calls the "I-we dilemma" inherent in utopian literature (76).[2] The I-we dilemma "asks whether individuality and communality can coexist in the just society" (79). Tepper's novel is one built upon blatant juxtapositions and contradictions. In the novel, Tepper presents her reader with two seemingly distinct and utterly different societies. One is Women's Country, a benevolent and egalitarian female society, which she contrasts with the society of the violent and hierarchical all-male warrior garrisons. Throughout the course of the novel, however, Tepper challenges the reader's preliminary assumptions about the two societies as striking similarities in their societal makeups emerge. Tepper artfully constructs a text rife with dualities, schisms and contradictions which the reader must continuously negotiate, causing his or her reading position to become enmeshed in ambiguity, and in turn, causing the very nature of the utopia presented to be questioned. Is Women's Country a utopia full of choice and individual expression, or simply a dystopia disguised, with trickery and deceit swimming beneath the surface? It is a question Tepper refuses to, and *cannot* answer. It is a question left for the reader to ponder. For, as Tepper and other critical utopianists believe, if there is any hope of achieving utopia, this hope lies in the attempt of each individual reader to recognize and attempt to reconcile the inherent duality that characterizes utopia – it is the process that is key.

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[2]The coinage of this term was inspired by the assertions of Adrienne Rich, who said that "there is no liberation that only knows how to say 'I.' There is no collective movement that speaks for each of us all the way through" (76). In her essay "The I-We Dilemma and a 'Utopian Unconscious' in Wells's *When The Sleeper Wakes* and Le Guin's *The Lathe of Heaven*," Carol Franko does not mention Tepper's *The Gate To Women's Country*. However, her essay provides much insight into the troublesome, dualistic nature of utopian literature which I explore within this thesis.

The relatively few critics who have dealt explicitly with Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country* have failed to consider the novel as a critical utopia and have focused solely on male-female relations within the text.[3] The result is a serious misreading of the text and of the utopian genre. In fact, the critics do not even believe that the book is successful in its utopian aim, and do not view Women's Country as a potential utopia. Jenny Wolmark, for example, asserts, "it is the unresolved conflict between different definitions of masculinity which undermines the potentially utopian aspects of Women's country" (qtd. in Pearson 213). Wendy Pearson agrees with Wolmark and goes on to say that:

> [Tepper's work] proves unable to sustain the weight, leaving the reader to wonder at the end whether this supposedly 'better' world is or is not really Hades, and what that might mean. The conflation of...dystopia and utopia remains unclear throughout the course of the novel and is not fully resolved at the ending of either novel or play. (207)

Similarly, Peter Fitting believes that *The Gate to Women's Country* is unsuccessful because the events which transpire in the novel "violate [his] own utopian ideas about the importance of education and democracy" (43). Jenny Wolmark has suggested that the description of Women's Country as Hades is "double – edged." She believes "it expresses the gulf between the new gender relations of Women's Country and the patriarchal relations of the garrisons... The narrative attempts to be both an avowal of feminism and a statement of the

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[3] In the course of my research for this chapter I was dismayed to discover that there exist only four in-depth discussions of Tepper's work: Peter Fitting's "Reconsiderations of the Separatist Paradigm in Recent Feminist Science Fiction," Wendy Pearson's "After the (Homo)Sexual: A Queer Analysis of Anti-Sexuality in Sheri S. Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country,*" Sylvia Kelso's response to Pearson's article "Notes and Correspondence: On *The Gate to Women's Country*: An Exchange," and Jenny Wolmark's *Aliens and Others: Science Fiction, Feminism and Postmodernism.* Other essays only mention Tepper in passing, in relation to other female SF writers such as Ursula Le Guin.

need for masculinity to confront its own myths" (qtd. in Pearson 206). Wendy Pearson discounts the possibility of utopia altogether (203), stating that her impetus for critiquing the novel was to articulate "the strong negative reaction that [she] had, both intellectually and emotionally, when [she] read Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country* for the first time" (200), because she sees Women's Country as a place where "men and homosexuals have vanished along with all other non-domesticable species" (203). Critics who ardently disagree with Pearson's reading, such as Sylvia Kelso, nevertheless believe that the central argument Tepper is making is about male-female relations: "Surely the strongest point of argument is not the treatment of male homosexuality but the glaring absence of any alternate female sexuality in Women's Country" (138). Peter Fitting, who claims that his approach, "focuses less on literary or 'textual' qualities" than on the ways in which *The Gate to Women's Country* functions as an interlocutor "in an ongoing dialogue in which a number of writers influenced by feminism and by a flourishing utopian tradition use the imaginative potentiality of SF to evoke and to probe alternative visions" (32), also ultimately bases his discussion on the portrayal of gender relations. He asserts that Tepper's work is very much a reply and reworking "of the central themes of feminist utopias of the 1970's. A central concern of many of those works was understanding and explaining the violence of patriarchal forms and values" (33). Even critics who seemingly applaud Tepper's attempt at envisioning utopia feel the need to take issue with her portrayal of the sexes:

> In Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country*, the egalitarian and humane women's society in the cities is contrasted to the aggressive and cruel men's world in the surrounding countryside. Tepper succeeds at

> creating an interesting and inviting women's society, but her depiction of men's societies is a caricature. Indeed, in one scene her militant men dance around a statue of an erect penis. (Wilcox 169)[4]

As we see confirmed by Wilcox's statement, all critics who have dealt with *The Gate to Women's Country* seemingly find fault with the novel in one way or another because of the portrayal of men and women within the text; the result is a serious misreading of the text as well as the utopian genre. Critics find the utopian aim of the novel unsuccessful because they do not account for the fact that *The Gate to Women's Country* is a critical utopia which, by its very nature, is meant to be ambiguous in its utopian aim. The 'utopia' Tepper imagines is in no way meant to be prescriptive. The utopia can only emerge when the reader engages and grapples with it.

Not to be mistaken, I in no way deny the importance of the issues of feminism and gender relations to the text. However, I do not believe that they are the central, let alone *only* concerns Tepper wishes to address. Readings that concentrate solely on gender issues lose sight of the many subtle intricacies of Tepper's work and the true aim of the novel. It is my assertion that the issues surrounding gender within the text serve to foreground and highlight the larger issues and implications which Tepper wishes to explore – namely the covert manipulation and shaping of individual ideologies and impulses by the ruling

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[4] In his essay "Governing the Alien Nation," Wilcox only mentions *The Gate to Women's Country* in passing. It would therefore be misleading of me to assume to know exactly how Wilcox interprets Tepper's work. I do think, however, that it is quite telling that, although he only mentions it in passing, Wilcox believes it worth pointing out that men in Tepper's novel are simply *caricatures*. What this statement by Wilcox does indicate is that all critics seemingly find fault with the novel in one way or another because of the portrayal of men and women within the text. As a result, they 1) (like Wolmark, Fitting, and Pearson) dismiss it as a utopia altogether, or 2) (like Wilcox) mention it in passing so as to not fully investigate its utopian potential.

class – the 'I-we' dilemma – the duality of the utopian vision. It is not the relations between the genders that are of central import to Tepper; rather, Tepper is interested in how the interaction of males and females is manipulated by those in charge, and the effect this has upon the functioning of the individual and individuality within the given societies.

One need only consider the opening sentence of *The Gate to Women's Country* to realize that Tepper's focus in the novel is centred not around group dynamics, but around the individual and individual selfhood: "Stavia saw herself as in a picture, from the outside, a darkly cloaked figure moving along a cobbled street, the stones sheened with a soft, early spring rain" (1). The character Stavia predominates in the novel. From the outset, the reader is presented with a highly self-reflexive and deeply introspective character – one who *sees herself* within the bigger picture and, the reader can immediately infer, one who is continuously reflecting on the nature of her selfhood within that society. What's more, this subtle passage also gives the reader great insight into the nature of that selfhood - Stavia is a divided self. The fact that Stavia is able to 'view herself from the outside' indicates a schism, one between the inner Stavia and the Stavia she presents to the world around her. That Tepper wishes to make the dual nature of Stavia's character clear to the reader is undeniable, and explicitly stated in the text:

> [Stavia's] accustomed daily self was often thrown all at a loss and could do nothing but stand aside upon its stage, one hand slightly extended toward the wings to cue the entry of some other character – a Stavia more capable...When the appropriate character entered, her daily self was left to watch from behind the scenes. (1)

As we shall see throughout the course of this chapter, Stavia is systematically forced, both covertly by the society in which she lives, and through personal experience, to separate herself into two distinct beings in order to survive: "actor Stavia" (1), and "Stavia the observer" (2), the "real Stavia" (13). Stavia is the embodiment of the duality of utopianism that Tepper wishes to explore. Stavia attempts to be both an 'I,' – the real Stavia, the inner Stavia, who is left simply to observe – and a 'We' – the actor Stavia, who is an outward expression that she presents to those around her, and that acts in perfect accordance with societal dictates. The question is how authentic an existence is this for Stavia? Does she, in fact, manage to achieve and assert her individuality within society or is she simply bowing to the will of the Women's Country Council, just another cog without the freedom of choice, helping to ensure the continued efficacy and 'progress' of a new society?

In *The Gate to Women's Country* Sheri Tepper portrays the slow building of this new society. Women's Country is a "post-holocaust world in which the pre-convulsion society, identified by the Council as male...is blamed for having allowed nuclear weapons to destroy their own society and much of the earth" (Pearson 204). As a result, the founding members of Women's Country have separated themselves from the 'violent' males who now live in surrounding garrisons. Women's Country is a nascent society. It is a society in transition, which has only been working for three hundred years in an attempt to reclaim the earth and undo the ravages of nuclear war. Upon first reading, if one compares the utterly static society presented in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* with the constant flux of Women's Country, the two societies may

seem diametrically opposed. These two 'utopian' societies have one striking similarity, however. The rulers of both societies go to great lengths to limit individual thought and expression in order to ensure societal stability. Although Women's Country is in the process of becoming, it is essential that the governing elite control the ideologies and beliefs of the inhabitants, as the councilwomen, desperate never to bring about the 'great devastations' again, have a definite vision of what they wish to achieve. Interestingly enough, just as in *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* the Councilwomen of Women's Country rely on a programme centred around the manipulation of language and oral tradition in order to achieve their utopian vision. Specifically, they turn to mythic narratives, and dramatic (re)presentations of those myths, to help shape and define the ideologies of the inhabitants and, by extension, the society in which they live.

Mythic images and allusions predominate in the novel as well as in Women's Country. The central fixture of Women's Country, alluded to in the book's title, is a singular, massive gate which separates the women and servitors from the garrisons. The gate is plain and simple in design, with a single image adorning it. It is "a simple sheet of polished wood, with a bronze plaque upon it showing the ghost of Iphigenia holding a child before the walls of Troy" (Tepper 5). No matter how simple, the relief of the single mythic figure of

Iphigenia is nonetheless extremely powerful in its function. [5] Not simply a physical barrier protecting the society of Women's Country, Iphigenia acts as an ever-present icon, like Oceania's Big Brother, and the gate enables the governing elite to subliminally influence the thought processes of the citizens, shaping, and even limiting their critical ability - and by extension, their selfhood. The gate serves as a daily psychological reminder of the treachery, deceit, and danger of men, causing the citizens to distrust the opposite sex and to believe them to be excessively callous and violent. Moreover, not only does the iconic figure of Iphigenia enable the Councilwomen to manipulate ideologies and attitudes, giving them an ontological stranglehold on the inhabitants of Women's Country, but the myth also lends validity, and thus, authority to the manner in which Women's Country society is constructed – bringing a much needed sense of stability and cohesion to a society in flux. As John Weir Perry outlines in *The Heart of History*:

> Myth and ritual not only give expression to what is occurring in the deep levels of the psyche at any time, they also function to guide the emotional energies of societies into new channels required by changing conditions, such as those of an urban culture as it emerges out of the village life that preceded it, in the transition from an agrarian economy to a Bronze Age.

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[5] In traditional Greek mythology, Iphigenia was sacrificed at the hands of her father, the Commander in Chief of the Greek army, Agamemnon, in order to appease the Goddess Artemis and procure safe passage for their ships at Aulis to go and do battle in the Trojan War. In order to get the unsuspecting Iphigenia to come with him to Aulis and also deceive Iphigenia's mother Clytemnestra, Agamemnon announced that Iphigenia was to be married to Achilles before the army sailed off to Troy as a reward to Achilles for joining the expedition. So she was taken to Aulis dressed in a bridal gown where she was sacrificed on an altar. Iphigenia came to represent purity and beauty, the ultimate self-sacrificing woman. Some accounts of the story, however, believing that the death of Iphigenia was slanderous to Artemis, the protectress of helpless creatures, go on to say that Artemis, taking pity on Iphigenia, rescued her at the last moment and took her to the land of the Taurians where Iphigenia was made priestess of the Temple of Artemis. For a complete recounting of the Iphigenia myth see Edith Hamilton's *Mythology*, pages 181-182 and 248-253.

> Myth in this case gives form and expression to the meaning of the powerful realities of human experience in times of reorientation and culture change. (8)

Thus, through the omnipresence of the Iphigenia myth, the citizens are constantly reminded that the reality which they are presently experiencing was brought about as a result of male incompetence as well as a penchant for violence. The inhabitants of Women's Country, almost blindly following the dictates of the Councilwomen, are led to believe that this way of life is a better alternative than pre-convulsion society.

The Councilwomen's use of myth to promote peace of mind and instil in the inhabitants a sense of stability is in no way a new and ingenious practice. As Meyer Reinhold outlines in his work *Past and Present*, since the inception of myths, people have used them to lend a sense of social cohesiveness, no matter how illusory, in times of great turmoil and transition by connecting the present with the past, thus anchoring the current society temporally:

> In this yearning for stability, myths served an important function because they embodied the traditional values of the past...[as] models that serve as fixed points in a world of insecurity and change; their repetition made it easier to face the insecure future. (28)

The reader is quick to realize, however, that the Councilwomen in no way wish to 'embody the traditional values of the past,' for it is precisely past practices and mentalities which they are attempting to eradicate. As we shall see, what the Councilwomen do, in fact, is reminiscent of practices employed by The Party in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four.* The Councilwomen do not use ancient Greek myth in order to embody and promote the values of the past; rather, they use myth in order to *create* the 'values of the past' as they see fit. Like The Party,

the Councilwomen construct the pasts of those they govern. As Bruce Lincoln extrapolates, the retelling of myths not only helps to stabilize burgeoning communities, but can also be successfully used in order to change societal attitudes and thus, shape society itself: "[Leaders] can advance novel lines of interpretation for an established myth or modify details in its narration and thereby change the nature of the sentiments (and the society) it evokes" (25). In fact, malleability and manipulation lie at the heart of myth and are essential to all mythmaking: "The traditional mythic material always remained in Greek hands a malleable heritage which was constantly remoulded for new purposes" (Reinhold 34).[6] What's more, "of special importance is the fact that, as civilization advanced, conscious efforts were made by rulers to use myths for political propaganda" (29). The Councilwomen do just this. Understanding the latent power of a good story, the governing elite of Women's Country appropriate the figure of Iphigenia as a propagandistic figurehead and rework the original Iphigenia myth, creating the play *Iphigenia at Ilium* in order to help them reach their desired end – a society free from male violence and destruction.

Just as in Oceania, the Councilwomen do not limit their propaganda machine to a single icon. In fact, they rely most heavily on a combination of two forms of very persuasive discourse – ritual and dramatic spectacle – in

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[6] It is important to note here that, throughout the course of this chapter, when referring to myths and the mythmaking process, I will generally be using Greek myth and mythmaking practice as my point of reference. I have chosen to do so because all of the myths utilized in Tepper's work to which I will refer are of Greek origin. This in no way diminishes the argument put forth, however, as malleability and manipulation are common to all mythic traditions. See, for example, Bruce Lincoln's *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, Meyer Reinhold's *Past and Present*, and John Weir Perry's *The Heart of History: Individuality in Evolution.*

order to fully ensure the efficacy of their social system. Life in Women's Country is informed by, and centres around one mythic dramatic narrative – *Iphigenia at Ilium.* Even more so than the gate into Women's Country, the play and its effects are unavoidable, both for the citizens of Women's Country as well as the reader. Every member of Women's Country has either read the play or has seen it performed, and "all the drama students had to learn how to make costumes and do makeup and build sets, in addition to learning the part of at least one character in the play" (23). What's more, Tepper intersperses scenes from the play throughout the text and they comprise approximately one third of the novel. The play, its importance, and the extent to which those in power manipulate it cannot go unnoticed by the reader.

The play *Iphigenia at Ilium* is "the traditional play that the Council put on every year before the summer carnival" (Tepper 23). What the reader soon realizes, however, is that the play is anything but a 'traditional' retelling of the tale of the ill-fated Iphigenia. As Joshua reminds Stavia, *Iphigenia at Ilium* "is based upon a millennia-old preconvulsion story concerning a conflict between two garrisons, the *Greeks* and the *Trojans*" (28); however, it is a tale *very* loosely based on the infamous Trojan War.[7] What the Councilwomen do is to combine two mythic episodes from ancient Greek mythology, the sacrifice of Iphigenia at Aulis as well as the aftermath of the Trojan War, and transplant the ghost of Iphigenia into the latter, thus creating an alternate, imagined ending to the tale – their own myth. The manipulation of the myth is in no way a furtive action on

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[7] Apart from the attempted sacrifice at Aulis, Iphigenia does not factor into the events that transpire at Troy. In fact, Iphigenia, neither in corporeal nor spiritual form, ever makes an appearance at the walls of Troy.

the part of Tepper. As we shall see, Tepper uses blatant manipulation of the myth in order to demonstrate to her readers exactly how powerful and persuasive a story can be in the negation or creation of selfhood.

Oral literature, and dramatic presentations in particular, have always been, and continue to be, of vital importance as one of the most effective means by which to shape the ideologies and beliefs of individuals. As John Weir Perry outlines in *The Heart of History*:

> In ancient cultures... these were regarded as necessary to both the spiritual and material well-being of a people, and the narration of these oral literatures, together with their representation in dramatic form on regularly repeated occasions, were considered absolutely vital for maintaining in their due order the forces at work in nature and in society. (22)

More importantly, however, as Bruce Lincoln clarifies in his work *Discourse and the Construction of Society,* regularly held dramatic performances not only enable those in power to disseminate important information and maintain the due order of society, but they also bring what is trying to be conveyed to life and allow those in power to determine what the 'due order of society' will in fact be:

> Myth is not just a coding device in which important information is conveyed, on the basis of which actors *can then* construct society. It is also a discursive act through which *actors* evoke the sentiments out of which society is actively constructed. (Lincoln 25; emphasis mine)

The ritualistic presentation of *Iphigenia at Ilium,* in which only the Councilwomen are allowed to perform, allows them to construct their own society. This shaping of the social structure by the Councilwomen, the reader is soon made aware, is extremely regimented and formulaic – akin to a scientific experiment. Every year, *Iphigenia at Ilium* remains unchanged and is performed exactly the same way as the year before in all the towns of Women's Country.

When Stavia inquires as to why the citizens of Women's Country are subjected to the same play year in and year out, her mother Morgot, a member of the Women's Council, has a simple and straightforward answer for her daughter: "It isn't that we don't get tired of it. It's that the play is part of the...part of the reminders. You know that!" (Tepper 28). The physical acting out of the myth brings the story to life, thus leaving an indelible imprint in the minds of the inhabitants. The play is an extremely effective medium, giving those in power an ontological stranglehold over those they govern.

Wendy Pearson, however, does not believe that Tepper's use of the interspersed scenes from the play is particularly effective within the novel. She believes the play is ultimately "unable to sustain the weight [of the novel]" (207), thus creating holes within the text. What seems to perturb Pearson the most is the degree to which the original myth of the fall of Troy has been altered by Tepper to create *Iphigenia at Ilium*. As she sees it, "there is one particularly visible absence in *Gate* and that is the absence of Patroclus from the play *Iphigenia at Ilium*" (219).[8] She goes on to say:

> There's no place for Patroclus even though his funeral rites were responsible for some of the women's deaths. Because Patroclus, too, is a warrior, because his relationship with Achilles is overtly homoerotic, and because he valorizes a very different kind of male myth, even his ghost may not make an appearance on stage. (220)

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[8] In the traditional myth which recounts the Trojan War, Patroclus is the beloved friend of Achilles who, when Achilles would not fight in the war, took Achilles's armour and, as a result, was then killed by the mighty Trojan Hector. At the news of his death, Achilles once again joined the war and turned the tables on the Trojans, leading the Greeks to victory. Patroclus's is a classic story of bravery and sacrifice. For a full recounting of the events of the Trojan War see Edith Hamilton's *Mythology* (178-192).

Although I do agree with Pearson that there is no place for Patroclus on the stage, I do not agree as to Tepper's motivations for the omission of Patroclus. Pearson believes that the omission of Patroclus by Tepper is done merely to make the juxtaposition of male and female blatantly clear to the reader: "[Patroclus] is not there in part because his presence would complicate the straight-forward...dichotomy between (male) Achilles and the other (female) characters" (219). What's more, she asserts that the missing presence of Patroclus is a "particularly apt illustration of Sinfield's dictum that 'All stories comprise within themselves the ghosts of the alternative stories they are trying to suppress'" (220). I think, however, that Pearson is misguided and is, in fact, confused as to who exactly is trying to suppress the ghost of Patroclus. Pearson seems to conflate the actions of Tepper the author with those of the Councilwomen who are responsible for the creation of the play *Iphigenia at Ilium*. It is the Councilwomen who are responsible for Patroclus's suppression. The omission of Patroclus is in no way a covert action on the part of Tepper simply to avoid complications; rather, this omission, along with other alterations, deliberately functions in the novel to *further* complicate a straightforward reading of the text.[9]

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[9] Due to the scope of this chapter, I have decided not even to consider how the reader is being manipulated by Tepper herself. The reader becomes further entwined in the construction of Tepper's utopian vision because, as Pearson is right to point out, "the reader's source of knowledge about women's country is twofold, both what Stavia is taught and what is being revealed by the play" (204). Just as Stavia's understanding of the inner workings of Women's Country continuously oscillates, the reader's understanding of Tepper's concept of utopia is also constantly in flux. We, as readers, are also being manipulated by Tepper's use of language and the manner in which she constructs her story. We are set up to believe one thing and then we have the rug pulled right out from under us.

That Tepper wants her reader to be aware of the manipulation of myth and storytelling performed by the Council of Women's Country is undeniable. *The Gate to Women's Country* is a too highly self-reflexive and metafictional text to believe otherwise. Even the dialogue of the play *Iphigenia and Ilium* itself calls attention to its own very purposefully constructed nature as well as the latent power of the story to shape the ideologies and beliefs of the masses for a desired effect. One telling example comes in the play when Achilles is shocked to discover that Iphigenia in fact died on the altar of Agamemnon and was not saved by the benevolent hand of Artemis:

> IPHIGENIA Some poet, hearing of your fatuous words
> composed a song about the bloody deed,
> and not content with truth, embroidered it
> with fulsome lies and patent sentiments.
> What really happened was, you hid yourself,
> And stayed in hiding until I was dead.
> ACHILLES It wasn't you who died. Artemis sent a hind
> to take your place. Everyone knows...
> IPHIGENIA What people know is what they want to know.
> That was a late come hind, great warrior,
> for I was there and never saw it come!
> Artemis sent no hind. (52)

Not content to leave it at this, Tepper further accentuates her point, by explaining exactly how a master storyteller is able to colour events and thus change them forever:

> IPHIGENIA And though by now all poets gloss it o'er
> to make it seem a different, kinder thing,
> there was no great Achilles at my side,
> no goddess-given hind to take my place.
> I made no offer of myself as a sacrifice,
> Though all the songs in Hellas say I did. (52)

In *Iphigenia at Ilium*, Iphigenia proclaims: "men like to think well of themselves, and poets help them do it" (57). Not only do poets help men think well of

themselves, but as the happy citizens of Women's Country attest, poets help others think well of them too – in this case the actions of the Councilwomen. The question still remains: if the inhabitants of Women's Country seem to be content, does this necessarily make it a utopia? How do they know it is a utopia if this is all the Councilwomen give them access to? Are they, in fact, leading fulfilled, individual lives?

Perhaps one of the most striking changes made to the classic narrative of the fall of Troy by the Councilwomen is that they turn it from a moving drama into a farcical satire:

> They use that crazy clown-faced doll for the baby. It doesn't even look like a real child. It isn't supposed to be a real baby. The old women aren't real old women. The virgins aren't really virgins. It's supposed to be a satire, you know?...A commentary on particular attitudes of preconvulsion society. (37)

The Councilwomen's choice to present *Iphigenia at Ilium* as a satire is an extremely calculated one. The effect of the satire is twofold. First, the farcical antics mask the serious nature of the play's subject matter, causing the majority of the audience to be unaware that they are in some aspects being influenced into accepting the actions of the Councilwomen. In this sense, the laughter elicited by the play works much like the anger elicited by the Two Minutes Hate: both negate any critical ability of the spectators. The spectators are therefore unable to fully question that with which they are being presented. Secondly, few of the audience members know the hilarity and high jinx of the action are also purposefully used to mask the hidden messages and meanings encased within the play – meanings which only the most astute observers can discern and interpret. It also functions, therefore, as a test to find observers

who, because of their critical abilities, might be asked to join the Council. Although Stavia does not realize it at first, she is one such person. She does not react to the play in the same manner as the majority of those in Women's Country; she seems to keep "forgetting [the play] is a comedy!" (37). Rather than being moved to laughter by the play, oftentimes Stavia is brought to tears. As she says to Morgot's servitor Joshua: "I was reading it to distract myself, but I keep finding things in it that apply to me. Like Iphigenia being tricked to come down to Aulis" (Tepper 54). To this statement Joshua replies, "they wouldn't be acting it out every year in every city of Women's Country if it weren't applicable to something" (54). What exactly it is applicable to, however, is much more than Stavia first realizes.

The Councilwomen of Women's Country are not the only ones who rely heavily on myth and ritual in order to maintain stability and ensure the efficacy of their social system. The commanders of the garrisons also use and manipulate ancient myths and ritual, manifested in the warrior cult, in an attempt to shape personal ideologies and create a homogeneous unit of valiant warriors – to be a successful army, they must live and fight as one.[10] The warriors of the garrison, however, do not rely on the myth of *Iphigenia at Ilium.*

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[10] Peter Fitting and other critics are right to point out that "the warrior cult itself was deliberately created by the women as an elaborate program to select for non violence" (37). Similarly, Wendy Pearson states that, "because the text specifically says that the garrisons were created by the women, it seems to me that the "myth" we are playing out here is no longer a male myth of the glorification of heroic violence, but a reworking of that myth by the women for their own purposes" (207). This fact, however, does not lessen the extent to which the Warriors now rely on myth and ritual, as they are oblivious to the actions of the women. That the women began the cult also actually illustrates how pervasive myth and ritual are in the inner workings of Women's Country and, in fact, it is my assertion that Tepper wishes the reader to be aware of exactly how the women are reworking the myth for their own purposes – that is the point.

Instead, they appropriate the story of the Greek mythological figures of Odysseus and his son Telemachus to fit their purpose.[11] In the warrior's parading ground just outside the gates of Women's Country stands a large monument of an erect penis at the foot of which is "a statue of two warriors in armour, a large and a small, father and son" (17). Whereas the Councilwomen paint Odysseus as "a fox" (51) in their play, the generals of the warrior garrison elevate him as an exemplar of the ideal warrior – brave and virtuous – and Telemachus as undyingly loyal, further illuminating the ways in which stories can be altered to produce the desired effect; in this case, obedient, noble, and brave warriors. What is also of note is that, as in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* with its telescreens, the attempted conditioning of individuals begins immediately when a son is introduced into the garrison at the age of five. When a son is handed over to his warrior father a ritual ensues:

> "Warriors! Behold my son!" Then there was a wild outcry from the warriors, a hullabaloo of shouts and cries, slowing at last into a steady bottomless chant, "Telemachus, Telemachus, Telemachus," so deep it made your teeth shiver. Telemachus was the ancient one, the ideal son, who defended the honour of his father, or so Joshua said. The warriors always invoked Telemachus on occasions like this. (15-16)

All warriors participating in the ritual are effectively lulled by the 'deep bottomless chant' – the hypnotic language. One cannot help being swept up in the frenzy. The receiving of warrior sons, in effect, takes on the characteristics of a deeply religious ceremony which serves to indoctrinate:

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[11] Odysseus was immortalized in Homer's *The Odyssey*. The tale documents Odysseus's many tribulations in his attempt to return home to Ithaca, his loving wife Penelope, and his son Telemachus, who never gave up hope that his father would one day return.

> The religious ceremonies are, then, festivals of memory. "Knowing" means learning the central myth...and endeavouring never to forget it. The real sacrilege is to *forget* the divine act. (Eliade 107)

The warriors, no matter whether they choose to return through the gate to Women's Country or not, can never forget. It is impossible.

Similar to The Party in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as well as the Councilwomen of Women's Country, the warriors of the garrisons also effectively combine myth and ritual to ensure the success of their social system. Another such ritual, perhaps even more effective than the one that occurs upon the handing over of the warrior son, is the ritual performed on the day of choice when a boy turns fifteen and decides whether he is going to remain a warrior or return through the gate to Women's Country. Those that choose to return through the gate, like Stavia's brother Habby, risk being ridiculed, attacked and beaten by the other warriors. Those who choose to stay like Chernon, however, are treated to a boisterous ceremony of triumph that is intoxicating:

> Blood boiled out from the center of him to simmer in his veins. The music of the trumpets filled him. The hammer of the drums became the hammer of his own heart. The feet of the men falling in unison, the whip and snap of the banners, the ribbons, the plumes, and the drums, the drums. Honour, the trumpets cried. Honour, the drums beat home. Power, the garrison cried... He was here to learn of this, this mighty fabric of motion and sound, this tapestry with Chernon moving as a thread within it. (153)

It becomes clear from this excerpt that, as with the ritual practice of the Two Minutes Hate in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* the rituals performed when the boys enter the warrior cult at the age of five, as well as those performed on 'the day of choice', serve to further indoctrinate warriors into the cult, shaping their beliefs and ideologies. The mighty, rhythmical beating of the

drums acts just as does the Two Minutes Hate – it ensures the complete emotional involvement of the participants, while at the same time negating all critical attitudes. This is confirmed when Chernon, who did not harm Habby earlier in the day when he had the opportunity to do so, during the ceremony thinks to himself:

> If he could have been in the ceremonial room at that moment, he would have stripped Habby and spit on him and hissed him and then helped to beat him, too, and he would not have cared what stories were carried back to Women's Country. (153)

With the generals' effective use of ritual, the warriors become automaton-like and lack the ability to make individual choices, and by extension, lack the ability to assert an authentic self.

What is interesting to note, however, is that ultimately it is the garrison's use of the central myth of Odysseus which in fact drives Chernon to venture out on his own, which, in turn, causes him to begin to question all that he has been led by the garrison to believe:

> In the Odysseus Saga there was that long journey when old Odysseus fought to get back to his own garrison after the great war with Troy! In a favourite fantasy, Chernon imagined himself as Odysseus, leaving the battlefield after the victory. (147)

Unable to separate fact from fiction, Chernon is consumed by his blind desire to become Odysseus and gain fame and, one could argue, an identity all his own – that of hero: "At first this idea of a quest, a journey, was only a recurrent fantasy, something to while away the long hours...Later it became an obsession. He would take Stavia along as a witness, as a scribe. Someone to record his

adventures" (147).[12] During their 'adventure' however, Chernon's need to feel manly and powerful – to be the embodiment of the archetypal hero - puts the two of them in grave danger. Chernon's inability to heed Stavia's warnings causes both of them to be captured by the hyper-puritanical Holylanders, a society utterly different from that of Women's Country, one where women are completely subjugated at the hands of violent male patriarchs. [13] At first, Chernon believes this to be the proper way of life and becomes excited to get word back to the garrison. He begins to change his opinion, however, once he is back at the garrison and he recalls the extent to which the Holylanders abuse Stavia. It is Chernon's encounter with the hyper-puritanical Holylanders that causes him to fully question the central mythic narrative propagated by the Generals:

> Was what he had seen what he really wanted? In all his dreams and journeying, all his dreams of heroic quest, he had not seen faces like those last two faces, and yet there must have been many faces like that when Odysseus was finished with his quest. He had killed and ravished everywhere he went. It sounded well in the sagas. They did not talk about the women's faces. Why was it that the sagas never spoke of the women's faces? (306)

I believe it is in this section of the novel that Tepper is at her most adept and where she begins to cement for her reader the truly ambiguous nature of

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[12] With this passage we, once again, see how powerful storytelling and, more specifically, the written word is in identity formation. Chernon feels that his hero status can only truly be achieved if his adventures can be put to paper, thus authenticating his existence and identity.

[13] What is interesting to note is that even the Holylanders have myth and storytelling at the heart of their society as well (the holy book). Tepper also goes out of her way to illustrate how they too manipulate stories in order to procure the desired effect: "Cappy told his story. Just as Stavia had changed her appearance for her own benefit, so had he changed the history of the brothers' expedition for their benefit. There was nothing in it of their desires for a woman, nothing in it of their original intention of keeping the woman hidden. Now it was all about duty to the family. They had gone out looking for sheep" (253).

Utopia. The trek to the Holyland is a motif that works. The journeying of Chernon and Stavia is both literal and figurative. It is only when Chernon and Stavia are able to separate themselves from the society in which they live and gain perspective that they begin to question the central myths which, up to this point, have informed their lives so completely. In questioning these myths, not only do they gain power over the Other – in this case the governing elite – by becoming aware of the constructedness of the tales; they also begin a journey towards realizing a 'self', cognisant of a difference, a knowledge, which separates them from the masses.

Chernon's journey towards self-actualization, however, is halted almost before it can begin. Chernon can only surmise that something is not quite right with the depiction of the heroic conquests talked about in the sagas. He is unable to decipher exactly how, and more importantly why they are being manipulated. As a result, upon his return to the garrison, he becomes depressed and disillusioned as everything he once believed in falls out from under him. He does not possess the capacity to fully interpret why the sagas are written in the manner they are and what effect they have. Tepper explicitly highlights Chernon's inability as an interpreter. Early in the novel, Michael has Chernon convince Stavia to supply him with books even though it is against the ordinances of Women's Country in the hope that it will give the warriors insight into the inner workings of Women's Country as well as information about a secret weapon believed to be held by the Councilwomen. While reading the books, however, Chernon discovers nothing:

> No mysterious knowledge. Nothing about the wonderful weapons. Nothing of the stuff he knew had to be there, somewhere. Stavia hadn't given him the right books. Probably those books, the powerful books, were secret. (Tepper 146)

Little does Chernon know, the books do contain vital information concerning the inner workings of Women's Country. The books speak of the process of selection, a process employed by the Councilwomen to breed for non-violence. Unable to interpret either the books Stavia gives him, or the Odysseus saga, Chernon cannot become a teller of his own tale. As a result, just as we witnessed in Winston Smith in *Nineteen Eighty-four*, Chernon's concept of self is unstable, continuously oscillating, and far from authentic. He is unable to write and define his own life for he is incapable of placing himself in relation to those sagas – unable to truly understand where he fits within the larger story.

It is the act of being able to interpret and thus act which is key to both Tepper's work and her ambiguous understanding of what constitutes utopia. As we have seen within the text, possibilities to disagree with the dominant myth do exist, and people do possess a certain amount of choice. Chernon does not have to return to the garrison, and Stavia's sister, Myra, can choose to leave Women's Country at any time. The question is: how much of a realistic possibility are these options? How much choice do these people possess? If Chernon does not return to the garrison, and if Myra chooses to leave Women's Country, their lives would undoubtedly be put in jeopardy. In order to truly assert a selfhood, one must learn to act within, and at the same time, define oneself against the constraints set forth by the society in which one lives. True self-awareness and personal empowerment can only be achieved when one can

interpret, and thus control one's own story – when one is able to become a teller of tales oneself.

Chernon lacks the critical ability needed to challenge societal dictates. Stavia, however, does possess the astuteness of mind which is needed and does in fact question the societal makeup of Women's Country. As early as childhood, Stavia is cognisant of the fact that the seeming benevolence with which Women's Country is run may be deceiving: "Not for the first time, she felt the wheels of Women's Country turning beneath the city, turning silently, without her help" (121). The Councilwomen, who are known for their acumen, also realize early on how perceptive Stavia actually is and her mother even says to her: "When you are grown, you may be asked to serve on the council" (126). Stavia's brutal experiences with the Holylanders, however, force the hands of the councilwomen and, as a result, almost left without choice, the councilwomen invite Stavia to become one of the esteemed few - a member of council. Thus, Stavia is asked to participate in perpetuating the central myth of Women's Country, the story of the beginnings, the myth of Iphigenia. She is afforded by the Councilwomen an avenue of self-expression and becomes a storyteller herself. But, as new information about the inner workings of Women's Country is presented to Stavia, she soon discovers that, in many ways, her new ontological freedom further restricts and confines her. Tepper, a true critical utopianist, unsettles her reader just as resolution is in sight. It is at this point that the reader, just like Stavia, is forced to re-evaluate everything that has gone before, and thus, re-evaluate the society as a utopia.

It is upon her return to Women's Country, when Stavia assumes the role of councilwoman and storyteller, that the closely guarded secrets of Women's Country are divulged to her. More importantly for the reader, it is following her return that the 'true story' of the beginnings of Women's Country are revealed. And what is revealed to the reader is a far cry from *Iphigenia at Ilium.* As Morgot explains in a conversation she has with the Michael, the general of the garrison of Marthatown:

> Three hundred years ago almost everyone in the world had died in a great devastation brought about by men. It was men who made weapons and men who were the diplomats and men who made the speeches about national pride and defense. And in the end it was men who did whatever they had to do, pushed the buttons or pulled string to set the terrible things off. And we died, Michael. Almost all of us. Women. Children.
>
> Only a few of us were left. Some of them were women, and among them was a woman who called herself Martha Evesdaughter. Martha taught that the destruction had come about because of men's willingness – even eagerness – to fight, and she determined that this eagerness to fight must be bred out of our race, even though it might take a thousand years. She and the other women banded together and started a town, with a garrison outside. They had very few men with them, and none could be spared, so some of the women put on men's clothes and occupied the garrison outside the town, Michael...It is part of our governance to see that [women] always greatly outnumber the men. (301-302)

It is here that the reader truly begins to realize the great extent to which the Councilwomen have altered the tales they tell in order to shape their society.

Perhaps the most shocking revelation comes when Morgot informs Stavia that, "the warriors father no children. Not for any of us" (283). With this single statement it becomes exceedingly clear that the governing elite of Women's Country are as controlling, regimented and ruthlessly manipulative as those that govern in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four.* It is here that the reader is able to

fully understand the power of the spoken and written word. This version of the beginnings of Women's Country is purposefully suppressed along with the covert eugenic practices implemented by those that govern because, if this information was divulged, it would contradict everything that the benevolent society of Women's Country has come to be. The homogeneous societal makeup of Women's Country, as well as the councilwomen's ontological stranglehold upon the inhabitants would be destroyed in an instant. Stavia, too, soon realizes how far the Councilwomen, and her mother in particular, are willing to go to achieve and protect their utopian vision.

Knowledge equals power. When coupled with a forum in which to impart it to others, said knowledge can become an extremely dangerous threat to those who govern a given society. As we have seen, an effective story that is disseminated amongst a group of people can shape and define beliefs and ideologies, and perhaps even incite a revolutionary faction. Understanding this, the councilwomen present Stavia with the choice to become a member of the council, for she knows too much. Stavia agrees, because she, either consciously or unconsciously, understands what the alternative is: "You would let them kill me, wouldn't you?" (294), she asks her mother. For the councilwomen, the vision of utopia towards which they strive is too precious and fragile a thing to take any chances. Just as with the Party, they too will kill in order to quell individual thought, because it can possibly give way to recalcitrant thought; this is exactly what they do to Chernon and the warriors of the garrison. Not wanting Chernon's knowledge of a different way of life, that of the Holylanders, to become widely known, as it might incite a revolt and

endanger the society they have fabricated, the councilwomen create a fake threat as an excuse to send the warriors off to do battle with the neighbouring garrison. The battle is a ruse, however, and what the councilwomen do in fact is knowingly send the warriors to be slaughtered. The councilwomen, discussing it with the other councils of Women's Country, make certain that the warriors of Marthatown will be outnumbered four to one. The councilwomen, who pride themselves on their policy of non-violence, are perhaps the most callous and violent people in the book...or are they simply acting nobly for a cause? Once again, it is a question for the reader to mull over.

The reader is not the only individual who is left in the midst of a conundrum. Faced with an onslaught of new, life-altering choices and information, as well as a new public role to uphold and grapple with, Stavia is left an extremely conflicted individual. With tradition and a society to uphold, Stavia must silence herself and is unable to freely express her thoughts and emotions, a constraint which greatly affects her sense of self:

> Something was wrong inside. Something broken that she hadn't known about, that Morgot hadn't known about, something wrong in there, like a fire burning at her from inside. A hairline crack in some essential part which was now growing wider, letting the fiery darkness out. (283)

Interestingly enough, it is precisely when Stavia is allowed by the Council to possess greater insight into the goings-on of Women's Country, and one would assume as a result, become more self-aware, that her sense of self becomes most unstable – becoming 'cracked' in its most 'essential' part. With increased ontological freedom, Stavia becomes more confined.

The reason for Stavia's unstable concept of self is connected with the power of language, both oral and written, to create or negate selfhood. As we have seen through the events which transpire in the novel, Stavia, at different times, assumes the role of interpreter as well as storyteller. The problem is, she is never permitted to assume both roles simultaneously, thus creating a schism in her concept of self. Because she is privy to as much information as any other member of council, she is able to interpret that information for herself. However, because of the fragility of the utopian aim of Women's Country, she is forbidden by the other members of council to share any of the privileged information. She must tell the story in exactly the same manner as it has always been told. Thus, she is unable to truly tell her own story and she must stifle her 'true' essence, which causes her to question exactly how authentic a life she is leading:

> How the hell am I supposed to feel? I can't say anything I want to. Not to Beneda. I can't tell her things. I hear her going on and on about Chernon returning from battle, and I...I feel like a filthy hypocrite. Like a traitor. I hate myself. (308)

Mirroring the sentiments of Winston Smith, who desperately attempts to 'write' himself a life but fails, Stavia too, unable to tell her story and define herself, becomes lost and confused:

> "It's like we are two people," Stavia said. "One who thinks. One who acts. Acts a part, as in a play."
> "Yes," her mother nodded. "That's exactly what it's like." (308)

With this exchange we are directly reminded of Carol Franko's concept of the I-We dilemma and the duality of the utopian vision. Can individuality truly exist within a utopia? By the novel's end Stavia is an 'individual' in that she feels

completely isolated from society and believes the existence she is living is inauthentic. Stavia is forced to become two separate entities and inhabit separate personalities when the situation dictates; she attempts to become both the 'I' and the 'We' - but to what avail? Is she any better off than the doomed Winston Smith?

At the end of the novel, Tepper artfully highlights all the issues I have attempted to raise and explore in the course of this chapter and thesis. She illustrates the power of the story in identity formation and control, as well as the ambiguous nature of Utopia. With the destruction of the garrison, the Councilwomen are faced with a problem. They must find a way to comfort the remaining inhabitants as well as conceal their own questionable and hypocritical actions. Once again, they turn to the manipulation of language and fabricate a tale in order to stultify the inhabitants, maintain the status quo and attain the desired end: "Adding together Council members and servitors, there had been many who knew the truth, but the truth had not been spoken. A myth was spoken instead. In time, what was spoken became truth" (312). Moreover, just to ensure that nothing like this would happen again, "a song had been written about the lost garrison, a song about betrayal of trust and broken ordinances and shame...It became popular and widely sung" (313), leaving an indelible mark on the minds of the inhabitants forever. The councilwomen legitimate and authenticate their actions through storytelling, thus shaping the lives of their people. Just as truth becomes legend and legend passes into myth, so too can myth pass into legend and eventually be made truth - if the story is good enough.

In the end, Stavia, as well as the reader, is left unsure of herself and her position on, and within, the society in which she lives. She is divided and left floundering, trying to figure out if, in fact, she can live with herself. If she is going to survive she must heed the words of her mother Morgot:

> Half of what we do is performance. Ritual. Observances. If we are seen to be in control, the people are calm and life moves smoothly...Doing nothing with an appearance of calm may be more important than doing the right thing in a frantic manner. Learn to perform, Stavia, I have. (126)

What is of utmost importance in Women's Country is that one learns to become a master storyteller, akin to a performer. The power of language is so great that, as Morgot points out, what you say does not matter as much as the manner in which you say it. The question which Stavia must grapple with is whether or not she can live her life as if in a play, as a performer, putting up a façade for all to see, one perhaps lacking in authenticity and truth.

The novel closes with the final scene of *Iphigenia at Ilium* and Stavia as Iphigenia uttering the words, "Hades is Women's Country" (315). This sentence is as jarring as it is ominous. As the final words reverberate in the mind of the reader, in an instant Tepper's seemingly benevolent society becomes almost as sinister as Oceania and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, replete with violence and hypocrisy. Is Women's Country a utopia, a better alternative? Or is it Hades on Earth, void of choice and individuality?

CHAPTER THREE

It isn't the world that is hostile – the stone and the leaf and the door of the world beckon and welcome – it's the grey city of the failed children of the world, the dry thinkers, the juiceless minds, the poison skulls that dream in numbers and megadeaths. They run the world, these failed children; they speak in all languages and in all languages their speech is vile. In bemedalled uniforms, in costly business suits and ties they mouth pompous words printed out by grey machines.

-Russell Hoban, *"I, that was a child."*[1]

Ink on paper makes books; books make worlds. You don't need a printing press, you don't even need to be grown-up.

-Russell Hoban, *"With a Choked Cry"*[2]

A visible shift occurred in utopian literature between the late 1940's, and the 1970's and 80's. Dystopias such as George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, first published in 1949, exposed and questioned the static and terrifying nature of the utopias which preceded his own, focusing on how individuality and selfhood are utterly destroyed in the name of the common good. As Gorman Beauchamp clarifies, this was not a trend specific to Orwell: the purpose of the dystopian novel was "clearly ideological," "to assert the ultimate value of man's instinctual freedom over the putatively melioristic repression of utopian civilization" (68). In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* this struggle is manifested in the decline of Winston Smith, 'the last man,' whose singular voice is stifled as all avenues of self-expression and definition are closed to him by the governing

[1] Page 774.
[2] Page 785.

elite. By the late 1970's, however, the 'critical' utopia emerged and authors such as Sherri Tepper began to examine this pessimistic view and the duality of utopianism, and re-evaluate the possibility for individual selfhood within utopia.[3] The result, however, was ambiguous to say the least and, as we witnessed at the conclusion of *The Gate to Women's Country*, the protagonist, Stavia, remains fragmented and incomplete as she is forced to develop two distinct selves – a public Stavia and a private Stavia. Orwell's and Tepper's novels, though different in aim, and seemingly diametrically opposed, share one interesting commonality – both texts contain utopian societies that are founded upon central, mythic narratives, and the protagonists utilize those narratives as the manipulation of language becomes the mechanism through which they attempt to assert an authentic self. Winston and Stavia are unsuccessful, however, as they both fail to possess a forum in which they are able to tell their own stories and thus shape and define their lives.

Not all critical utopias that were written in the 1980's, however, are as hauntingly ambiguous as Sheri Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country*. One such novel is Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*.[4] *Riddley Walker* is a post nuclear holocaust novel set in England in the year "2347 o.c. which means our count"

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[3] Other such critical utopias include Ursula K. Leguin's *The Dispossessed* and Joanna Russ's *The Female Man*.

[4] Some may take issue with my classification of *Riddley Walker* as a critical utopia. Traditionally, this novel is simply considered apocalyptic science fiction. The society in which Riddley lives is by no means ideal. However, I do feel that it is in line with societies such as Women's Country in Tepper's novel – it can be viewed as a Utopia in progress, in its most rudimentary form. As Gorman Beauchamp states: A utopian society is one that "attempts to reorder society into a more harmonious, efficient whole" (66). The governing elite in *Riddley Walker* is attempting to do just that by trying to rediscover nuclear fission and lost technology. Just as the definition of utopia is ever changing and malleable, so too is the classification of Hoban's text.

(Hoban 125), in which all 'high technology' is lost and the governing elite are attempting to regain the previous world's "clevverness" – namely the "1 big 1" – the atomic bomb and nuclear fission. Once again, those in power (the Mincery) rely on myths, stories and oral culture in order to proliferate party propaganda, to manipulate the inhabitants of Inland to do their bidding, and retain control in the name of progress. As with The Party in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the councilwomen in *Gate*, the governing body of Inland has a definite vision of what they wish to achieve and the direction in which their society is headed. In the protagonist Riddley Walker, however, we see the marriage of interpreter and storyteller and a resulting unity of self which was absent in both Orwell's and Tepper's works. Hoban's *Riddley Walker*, then, becomes a testament to the latent power of individual thought and creativity. It is this individual thought, creativity, and the power to express and communicate it which is able to combat the "dry thinkers, the juiceless minds, [and the] poison skulls that dream in numbers and megadeaths," as my first epigraph from Hoban puts it. And, as my second epigraph attests, Hoban, like Orwell and Tepper, believes that potential lies in the power of the spoken and written word – the story. Interestingly enough, it is in the utterly fruitless and barren landscape of *Riddley Walker* where the largest potential for utopia exists.

The thing that is usually most striking to readers upon first encountering Hoban's novel is the language in which it is written, and "since its publication in 1980 it has impressed many reviewers and enthralled a host of readers – not in spite of, but largely because of its language" (Lake 157). As Natalie Maynor and Richard Patteson explain: "[In *Riddley Walker*] Hoban constructs a future

language...His entire novel is written in a much altered version of English, by a first person narrator, shortly after the rediscovery of writing" (18). It is because of the unique prose of *Riddley Walker* that "Hoban's remarkable linguistic innovations have received much deserved treatment" (Branscomb 30) and Hoban has garnered attention as a writer.[5] As a result, many critics have become preoccupied with Hoban's futuristic language[6] and fail to fully recognize the intricate patterning and accomplishments of this extremely ambitious text – both stylistically and thematically.[7] Jeffrey Porter even goes so far as to misguidedly state: "*Riddley Walker* calls attention to itself principally as a novel exploring the relation between science and language" (450). Critics, such as Leonard Mustazza, who attempt to address themes and issues present in Hoban's text focus (almost too heavily) on the language in which the novel is written:

> The contours of the language [as well as Hoban's] vision of the world, [are] familiar enough: the language, though nonstandard, is decipherable; and the primitive society of foragers and farmers is recognizable in terms of the anthropological progress of our species. (17)

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[5] I feel that I must qualify this statement. Prior to *Riddley Walker*, Hoban had written some 50 children's books and three other novels – *The Lion of Boaz-Jachin and Jachin-Boaz* (1973), *Kleinzeit* (1974), and *Turtle Diary* (1975). However, for Hoban, *Riddley Walker* was, as Edward Myers puts it, "an improbable success," which "drew immediate and widespread critical acclaim" and "received disproportionate attention" (5-6). To this day, Hoban is best known as the author of *Riddley Walker* (Myers 6).

[6] The critic David Lake even went as far as to "begin rewriting *Riddley Walker* in present spelling" but was forced to give up after finishing only one page (163).

[7] See, for example, Jeffrey Porter's "'Three Quarks for Muster Mark': Quantum Wordplay and Nuclear Discourse in Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*" in which he very thoroughly outlines how the manner in which Hoban alters modern day English mirrors nuclear decay. Similarly, in their article "Language as Protagonist in Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*," Natalie Maynor and Richard Patteson analyse, among other things, the phonology and syntax of Hoban's language to illustrate how it is suggestive of "early stages in language acquisition of a child" (21), and thus, is indicative of the fledgling and primitive nature of Riddley's society. In "Language and Mysticism," David J. Lake goes to great lengths to show how even spelling itself is integral to the novel.

Although Mustazza provides several valuable insights into Hoban's work, ultimately his argument falls short. Similar to the criticism surrounding Sherri Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country*, much of the criticism that deals with *Riddley Walker*, like Mustazza's, focuses too heavily on Riddley's society at large, and fails to fully consider the plight of the individual protagonist for whom the book is named. [8] Many critics even fail to mention (or perhaps even notice) that the much-altered language of *Riddley Walker* is *Riddley's* language, for it is he, and not Hoban, or an anonymous narrator who is relaying his story to the reader.

Just as the analysis of the language of *Riddley Walker* has been widespread and varied, so too has the reaction to Hoban's novel. Jeffrey Porter, for example, who believes that the language of *Riddley Walker* is symbolic of radioactive decay (468), interprets the novel as a "dark promise of a never-ending cycle of ignorance and destruction" (453). Surprisingly enough, Porter is not alone in his reading. In fact, many reviewers and critics have viewed the novel in terms of its negative emphasis:

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[8] See, for example, Maynor and Patteson's article " Language as Protagonist" in which they argue, "the language contributes to this picture of primitive life, with its violations of today's standard English, its heavy reliance upon the concrete, and its child-like phonology and syntax" (20). Their argument is persuasive and enlightening; however, they keep their critique on a societal level. David Lake echoes this sentiment and believes that the main public issue concerning the members of Riddley's society (or at least the governmental elite) is that of progress: "Should one struggle to revive high technology, with all its dangers, or should one be content with a more primitive life at one with Nature and instinctive wisdom" (158). Jeffrey Porter does not even seem to care about the plight of Riddley himself as he states that "Hoban's interest in the idea of a post atomic world is more linguistic than anything else" (453), as if to say that Hoban simply wrote the story in order to display his linguistic prowess and command of language. I feel that to keep an analysis of a book which is so driven by a single, individual protagonist on a societal level does a great disservice to both the book and the author.

> Benjamin Demott...stated that the novel represents "a commanding summons to dwell anew on that within civilization which is separated from, opposite to, power and its appurtenances, ravages, triumphs"...Jennifer Uglow took the book to task for what she called its "pessimistic contempt for the masses which is hardly balanced by the promise of mystic intuition for an artistic elite. (qtd. in Taylor 28-29)

Other critics, along with myself, however, feel that *Riddley Walker* is not pessimistic, but rather quite the opposite – it is a text rife with hope for the future.[9] The discrepancy regarding the meaning of the text is a result, I believe, of the over-emphasis placed on the language.

I in no way deny that the language in which this novel is written is of great importance as it symbolically represents issues and themes raised in the book; however, as we see from the varied opinions of the novel (and even of what some of the words in the book actually mean[10]), it becomes quite evident that not only does the language become protagonist in the novel as Maynor and Patteson assert, but, in many ways, the reader also becomes protagonist as interpreter. Hoban purposefully constructs a language that obscures any finite

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[9] Nancy Dew Taylor, for example, believes that *Riddley Walker* "contains considerable elements of hope to temper the pessimism" (30). Similarly, Ronald Granofsky believes that "in the face of this affront to the instincts to nourish and perpetuate life, the child becomes a tremendously significant symbol of mankind's hope for avoiding holocaust" (175).

[10] Jeffrey Porter, for example believes that 'the 1 big 1' means WWIII, whereas Ronald Granofsky believes that 'the 1 big 1' means atomic power. Some may view this example as petty and slight; however, there are several other examples in the novel, and I feel that it has a great impact on both the manner in which one interprets the novel as well as on my argument. Believing that 'the 1 big 1' simply means atomic power provides the reader with many possibilities of how Riddley's world came to be the way it is – whether accidentally or purposefully. Porter's assertion that 'the 1 big 1' means World War III, however, presupposes many things about the events which transpired prior to the beginning of the novel. It assumes that it was a war between nations and the violence of man against man that destroyed the earth; however, war is never specifically mentioned in the text. From the outset, Porter is envisioning and creating his own back story to the novel, effectively becoming both interpreter and storyteller, which greatly affects how he will view and interpret the events which transpire in the novel.

meaning within the text, forcing the reader to discern his or her own meaning and truth. Effectively, each reader must become thoroughly engaged, grapple with the language, and decide what the story speaks to for him or her. It is my assertion, however, that it is not the language which concerned Hoban the most, but rather the myths, legends, and stories which cause Riddley to inscribe them in a futuristic text – it is the power of the story, the written word, which lies at the heart of understanding this novel.

David Dowling suggests in his article "Doing the Connections" that, "the answer lies in stories; Riddley challenges the vertigo of unresolvable equations by listening to and telling stories – finally, by becoming the hero of the one he is telling us" (183). Dowling, however, in making this statement, does not acknowledge that the greatest of Riddley's 'unresolvable equations' is ontological – it is a question of selfhood: Riddley wants to know who he is. Neither does Dowling place his argument in the context of identity formation within utopia, which I feel is imperative to fully understanding this text. Riddley challenges the restrictive nature and conventions of his society in an effort to discover who he is and define his own selfhood. As we shall see, the means through which he does this is the word, both written and spoken. He is compelled to do so: "Thats why I finely come to writing all this down. Thinking on what the idear of us myt be" (Hoban 7).

From the novel's outset, Hoban's interest in the reasons for and the process of mythmaking and storytelling are apparent. The plot of the novel centres on a young protagonist named Riddley Walker. The society in which he lives is a primitive one – it is mainly an oral culture, as the vast majority of the

population is illiterate. As a result, Riddley's society relies heavily on learning through an oral culture based on myths, stories, children's rhymes and even puppet shows, and they proliferate in the text. In his article "Doing the Connections," David Dowling conveniently lists all the mythic tales, which are interspersed throughout the text. They are as follows:

> "Hart of the Wud"
> "Why the dog wont show its eyes"
> "The Eusa Story"
> "The Lissener and the other voice out of the worl"
> "The Bloak as got on top of Aunty"
> "The legend of St Eustace"
> "Punch and Judy"
> "Stoan"
> [Riddley's] "Punch and [Pooty]." (184)

As Taylor points out, in a post-apocalyptic world, where there is so much fragmentation and such a search for meaning, "Riddley's learning begins where most learning begins – with myths that attempt to explain how the world and humanity get to be where they are" (31).

These fragmented myths, stories and rhymes are integral to Riddley's society because they attempt to deal with great turmoil. In his book *Myth and Reality*, Mircea Eliade identifies the ways in which primitive and traditional societies regard mythic stories:

> [Myth] relates events that took place in primordial time, the fabled time of the "beginnings." In other words, myth tells how, through the deeds of supernatural beings, a reality came into existence, be it the whole of reality, the Cosmos, or only a fragment of reality – an island, a species of plant, a particular kind of human behavior, an institution. Myth, then, is always an account of a creation – it relates how something was produced, came to be. (5-6)

In his article, "Myth and History in Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*," Leonard Mustazza takes this to mean that "the traditional (primitive) person would

regard myth as essentially historical, as the only reality" – as truth (18). Mark Schorer, in his essay "The Necessity of Myth" further explains the importance of these etiological myths (myths that explain how things came to be) within societies, especially archaic ones.[11] Schorer asserts that, "Myths are the instruments by which we continually struggle to make our experience intelligible to ourselves...[and]... myths have an organizing value for experience" without which "experience is chaotic, fragmentary and merely phenomenal" (355). The Tel Woman Lorna also is aware of the nature of these stories: "you hear different thing in all them way back storys but it don't make no diffrents. Mostly they aint strait storeys any how. What they are is difrent ways of telling what happent" (Hoban 20). Riddley tells us several stories, myths, episodes, and shows through which he attempts to order his existence and make his experience intelligible to himself.

The myth of the "Hart of the Wood" (Hoban 2) is a particularly good example of an etiological myth as it explains the creation of charcoal; however, it does much more than this. It also serves as a warning against the dangerous, destructive potential of man in his quest for 'clevverness.' Although the man and woman in the myth desire fire in order to ensure their survival, their lust consumes them and causes them to sacrifice their only child for fire. Their desire to make the fire bigger and bigger (symbolic of man's lust for technology and power) consumes them and, as a result, "the fire biggering on it et them up they bernt to death" (4). Encased within the simple myth about the

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[11] This is not to say that Riddley's society is necessarily archaic; however, it is a society which is in its most rudimentary and basic form, and thus, I feel that Schorer's research can help shed light on it.

creation of charcoal, "Hart of The Wood," is an important reminder of the dangers of greed and lust, which brought about the "1 big 1." As Ronald Granofsky points out: in this novel, the concept of holocaust "is used symbolically to suggest the insidious nature of man's destructive and self-destructive potential – insidious because the source of destructive energy is found to be virtually indistinguishable from the source of creativity" (172). David Lake echoes this sentiment and believes that the main public issue concerning the members of Riddley's society (or, at least, the governmental elite) is that of progress: "Should one struggle to revive high technology, with all its dangers, or should one be content with a more primitive life at one with Nature and instinctive wisdom" (158). It is a quandary which Riddley will have to confront in order to achieve the psychic wholeness he so desires.

The smaller inset myths, however, "are clearly secondary to the unifying cultural myth, the Eusa Story" (Mustazza 20). Briefly, the Eusa tale is a puppet show put on by the Mincery for the illiterate masses, which tells the story of Eusa, the man credited with discovering the '1 big 1' (the atomic bomb) in "the heart of the stoan." The tale is meant to warn the people of Inland of the danger of technology and its destructive capabilities. The Eusa Story functions in exactly the same way as 'The Two Minutes Hate" in Orwell's novel as well as the play *Iphigenia at Illium* in Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country*. The Eusa story effectively quells any resistance to party policy as it leaves an indelible mark on the minds of the citizens – its repetition is key: "Eusa Story the same as it ben wrote out 1st and past on down" (29). The reader soon discovers however, that the Mincery, like the councilwomen of Women's Country, has

ulterior motives for continuously retelling Eusa's story. The Mincery reiterate the Eusa Myth because they think enmeshed in the tale lies the chemical recipe for recreating 'the 1 big 1,' which they think will bring back the lost technological advancements of the past, and Goodparley believes that some individuals might be able to piece the puzzle together – namely Riddley as "hes a mover hes a happener" (118).

The Mincery understands the latent power of a story and the dangers of providing individuals with too much information – knowledge equals power and power maintains stability. Therefore, the Mincery keeps the Eusa Myth closely guarded and only certain individuals within the society have access to it:

> Every body knows bits and peaces of it but the connexion men and the Eusa show men they have the woal thing wrote down the same and they have to know all of it by hart. You wunt have seen the woal thing wrote without you been a Eusa show man or connexion man or in the Mincery. No 1 else is allowit to have it wrote down the same which that dont make no odds becaws no 1 else knows how to read. (Hoban 28)

What young Riddley fails to comprehend, however, is that it does 'make odds' that nobody else has access to the written word. Without access to writing, there is no possible way that other individuals could even begin to learn how to read. As a result, there is no possible way for anyone to challenge, let alone question, the authority of the Mincery. Through the manipulation and limiting of the written word, the masses of Inland are effectively kept automaton-like. Their future actions are decided for them and their identities, as homogeneous as possible, are simply pawns of the Mincery. Not realizing this Riddley, like Stavia and Chernon, is initially emphatic about the sacredness of the myth and

believes in it wholeheartedly. However, this almost blind acceptance does not last long.

On his naming day at the age of 12, Riddley experiences several events which cause him to question the myths and stories he has come to accept as 'truth' and send him upon a personal quest for self-knowledge.[12] The first is the death of his father who is killed while digging in Widders Dump, second is the baby who is "dead bertht at the form" (23) and last is "the old dog offering and took by brooder Walkers son" (24). These are all "blipful", or significant to Riddley, and they cause him to start to consider "that thing in us what thinks us but don't think like us" (7). In doing so, he begins his ontological search for answers, and like the other two protagonists whom we have looked at in this study, he turns to what he knows, the written word and the power of myth, in order to begin to make his experience intelligible to himself and, thus, assert an authentic self.

Perhaps more important than the three 'blipful' events which occur on his naming day is the fact that, because of his father's death, Riddley inherits the role of shaman or 'connexion man' of his farm. As Nancy Taylor rightly observes: "[Riddley] wants to create his own "tels" and "connexions" but quickly discovers that the Mincery – the ruling government (headed by Goodparley and Orfing) – expects him to follow party lines in his interpretation of the old stories and myths handed down by word of mouth since Bad Time (the nuclear

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[12] It is interesting to note here that, like Stavia and Chernon, Riddley too must leave the society in which he lives in order to gain a fresh perspective and be able to fully interpret the stories being told to him. It is only then that he is able to truly begin to figure out who he is.

holocaust and its aftermath)" (27). Their reason for doing so is simple; in order to control the mindsets of the people, the Mincery must control what thoughts are being put into their minds.

Regardless of the direction of the Mincery, however, in a 'trants reveal' for his first connexion, Riddley spews out the extremely cryptic, yet important words "EUSAS HEAD IS DREAMING US" (59). The audience is confounded and at a loss for meaning, as is Riddley himself. Nancy Taylor is the only critic that I came across who attempts to interpret Riddley's tel, and although what she says is quite interesting, even she seems a little uncertain:

> This seemingly incomprehensible connexion means that that thing within us (the universal soul? God? Man's evil nature?) will direct our lives if we do not do our own directing. (33)

I think that Riddley's tel is more specific than this. Nowhere in the text is Eusa equated with 'that thing within us'; therefore, I think that this is a reference to the Mincery. Whether subconsciously or unconsciously, through his connexion, Riddley is attempting to alert people to the manipulative nature of the Government regulated Eusa Show. It is not 'that thing within us' which will direct the lives of the inhabitants of Inland if they do not begin to question things and do their own directing; instead, it is the Mincery that will do so, if the inhabitants fail to interpret the dangerous undertones which accompany this seemingly righteous puppet show. All selfhood and agency is being negated by the actions of the Mincery. With this episode the reader is first alerted to the essential role interpretation of myth and stories has in the identity formation of the individual.

It is not until a couple of days later, however, that the most significant event occurs and Riddley is compelled to strike out on his own in search of answers to his pressing questions. This event is the discovery of the punch figger by Riddley in Widders Dump:

> I put my han in the muck I reachit down and come up with some thing it wer a show figger like the 1s in the Eusa Show...this here figger tho it wernt like no other figger I ever seen. It wer crookit. Had a hump on its back and parper sewt ther in ther clof. (68-69)

Riddley has never seen this figger before and he unconsciously, or perhaps consciously, begins to understand that the past is something else than what he has been taught through myths, rhymes, and Eusa shows. As a result, he literally jumps the "fents" at the dump and begins his odyssey for answers. He feels compelled to act.

The 'dog frennly' Riddley, imbued with 1st knowing, is led to the Ardship of Cambry, who is being held captive so he can play his role in the re-enactment of the children's rhyme, Fool's Circel 9wys, which traces the path of the original Eusa. When the Ardship explains to Riddley why he is being held captive he says, "Don't you know the rhime?" to which Riddley replies, "What rhime do you mean?" The Ardship, also called Lissener, then proceeds to sing the rhyme:

> Horny Boy rung Widders Bel
> Stoal his Fathers Ham as wel
> Bernt his Arse and Forkt a Stoan
> Done It Over broak a boan
> Out of Good Shoar vackt his wayt
> Scratcht Sams Itch for No. 8
> Gone to senter nex to see
> Cambry coming 3 times 3
>> Sharna pax and get the poal
>> When the Ardship of Cambry comes out of the hoal. (76)

Riddley is dismayed and says: "that's Fools Circel 9wys that's jus a game," to which Lissener replies, "O yes it's a game rite a nuff if you like to call it that only it aint too much fun for the Ardship what gets his head took off at the end of it" (79-80). Riddley begins to understand the power and truth behind the myths, games and shows that shape his society.

Lissener also teaches Riddley something else – the importance of truly listening to or interpreting the stories which one is told. This message, of course, is relayed to Riddley through a myth – "The Lissener and the Other Voyce Owl of the Worl" (Hoban 82-83). Upon the completion of the tale, Riddley truly begins to understand not only the power of myth, but also the danger inherent in myths if they are accepted blindly and not questioned and interpreted. He asks the Ardship, "that owl tho he keaps trying dont he" (83), to which the Ardship replies:

> O yes he keaps trying and hewl do it 1 day too. All it takes is for no 1 to be lissening everything back. Hewl go the worl a way and his self with it and thatwl be the end of it. But may not be for a wyl yet. (83)

The above passage hauntingly echoes the world of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the demise of Winston Smith. Winston was the 'last man' and, as a result, he was completely isolated with nobody to listen to his stifled cry for help. If no individual has the ability to gain access to and interpret the dominant cultural myths of a society they will be lost, as will be any sense of personal freedom. Riddley blatantly equates the role of interpreting with becoming whole and asserting an authentic self: "Becaws I begun to know by then I wer some kind of lissener as wel. Being with Lissener brung it out and brung it on. I wunnert how I ever cudve fealt a live befor I begun to take thing in like I wer now" (97).

It is through the act of interpreting what one is told that the individual can then begin to question and discern truth for him or herself, and thus begin to shape and define his or her own existence.

Mustazza, however, believes that "the most significant thing that happens as Riddley and the Ardship make their way, is Lissener's account of how the Eusa story concludes, an account not recorded in the official myth" (22). What's more:

> Lissener's additions provide new and disturbing information to Riddley, who is supposed to be a member of the religious elite. If the Ardship is right, the version of the myth Riddley knows has been deliberately left incomplete by the powers that be in order to hide their own political agenda to control the people, using connexion men such as Riddley to further their own ambitions. (Mustazza 23)

I wish to argue that, even more important than this revelation, is that in a conversation he has with Goodparley, the pry minser, Riddley discovers that, first, Lissener has also left out sections of the myth for his own ends and second, the Eusa myth is in fact a conflation of what little historical information is known about life prior to and immediately following the nuclear holocaust, and the only surviving written document from before "Bad Time" – the legend of St. Eustace. What becomes quite clear, then, is that everyone involved with this legend is manipulating it and shaping it to their own experiences – Lissener (to make his people, the puter leat, seem virtuous), Goodparley (who uses it to look for the chemical formula for gunpowder), Riddley (who uses it and his experiences to create his own story), and ultimately Hoban (who births his story from it).

During the course of the conversation between Riddley and Goodparley the importance of myth in the shaping of individual ideas as well as the future is established by Goodparley himself, who basically admits to manipulating myth in order to get what he wants:

> O Riddley you knon bettern that you know the same as I do. What ben makes traks for what will be. Words in the air pirnt foot steps on the groun got us to put our feet in to. May be a nother 100 years and kids wil sing a rime of Riddley Walker and Abel Goodparley with ther circel game. (116)

Understanding this, when Goodparley asks Riddley for the bag of chemicals in his pocket which will inevitably bring about the '1 littl 1' (gunpowder) Riddley willingly gives it up in order to save the punch figger in his pocket:

> Funny thing. I dint want him going thru my pockits getting his hans on that blackent figger whatd put me on the road to where ever I were going. There wernt no way I cud hide that bag of stoans so I took it out of my pockit and I helt it out to him. (118)

Riddley now understands that the punch figger and the ability to tell his own story is far more powerful and important than chemicals, as is his new found knowledge concerning the manner in which myths and stories are manipulated. As Lincoln outlines in *Discourse and the Construction of Society*:

> Change comes not when groups or individuals use knowledge to challenge ideological mystification, but rather when they employ thought and discourse, including even such modes as myth and ritual, as effective instruments of struggle. (7)

The punch figger is the instrument of that struggle. It put him on the road to wherever he is going. It started him on his road of discovery and self-actualization, and he realizes that it is what will help him assert an authentic self (eventually through his own Punch and Pooty show). Although Riddley

realizes the allure of scientific advancements, which is evidenced when he proclaims:

> Oh what we ben! And what we come to!...How could any 1 not want to get that shyning Power back from time back way back? How could any 1 not want to be like them what had boats in the air and picters on the wind? How could any one not want to see them shyning weals turning? (Hoban 100)

he also recognizes their danger and ultimately rejects them, opting to make his own track.

As the reader is made aware of new bits of information along with Riddley, Mustazza states that:

> The question to be asked at this point is this: What are we to make of the alterations and assertions introduced as the narrative progresses? Put another way, what has become of the "truth" of the original myth as Riddley and his people knew it? (24)

Indeed, this new information leads Riddley to doubt the facts of the central myth and causes him to look inward, the culmination of which is his transcendental moment at Cambry when he realizes that changes and power must come from within the individual, and for the first time he is able to order his experience and feel a sense of harmony with the universe – "learning to be his own black dog, his own Ardship" (98).

What is interesting to note is that it is at this point, when Riddley can no longer depend on the voices and stories of others, that he turns to himself, looks inward, and feels compelled to become author of his own tales. As Roger Schank states in *Tell Me a Story*: "Storytelling and understanding are functionally the same thing" (24). Thus, when Riddley begins to tell his own stories, he effectively can begin to truly understand who he is. The first story

that he creates himself is *Stoan* (Hoban 158). This is the first story which is not relayed by someone else through Riddley: " It aint no story tol to me nor it aint no dream. It jus some thing come into my head wylst I ben on my knees there in that stoan wood in the woom of her what has her woom in Cambry. So I am writing it down here" (158). In it, Riddley expounds upon his personal philosophy, which he comes to live by. The stone becomes a metaphor for psychic wholeness. Although one is desirous for the world to change, all of the changes must come from within first – start at the level of the individual. It is only when the individual goes through his or her 'master changyis' that change can be effected on a societal level.

Leonard Mustazza, with his anthropological and anthropocentric critical mindset, believes that the events that transpire in *Riddley Walker* illustrate "the subtle shift toward modernity of outlook," namely, "the movement away from traditional society's reliance upon myth as a unifying intellectual force" (18). Although I agree that there is a "shift toward modernity of outlook" taking place in the text, I do not agree that Hoban's vision is a shift in which myth no longer acts as a "unifying intellectual force." Mustazza cites the fact that "the ruling powers of the country are more concerned with history than myth, more concerned with how knowledge of the past can lead to future developments than with the lessons of the past." Even further, "what Riddley - and through him, the reader – is witnessing in these revelations is the emergence of the Modern World, the modern attitude, which rejects the disguised truth of myth and embraces history as a means toward continued progress" (25). I believe, however, that what we get at the end of the novel is "mythmaking in progress,"

with Riddley not rejecting the truth of myth, but rather incorporating it into his new philosophy, building upon his past experiences, and illustrating for the reader the fluid and malleable nature which lies at the heart of all forms of storytelling and mythology.

At the end of his anthropological study of the text, Mustazza emphatically argues:

> We can *easily* extrapolate, based upon our knowledge of humankind's anthropological progress, that the sacred myth of origin – (namely the Eusa story) - will soon lose its prestigious centrality in Riddley's world, despite his attempts to keep it alive through his performance of Punch and Judy puppet shows... [The new Walker and Orfing show] is too self consciously contrived to gain a strong foothold as a sacred cultural ritual. Rather, the ruling powers are ready to cast off the primitive superstitions of the past, and their program is, by the end of the novel, fairly well defined: To regain the lost "clevverness" of the past at whatever the cost. (25 – emphasis mine)

What Mustazza fails to acknowledge, however, is that although the legend of Eusa may, in fact, 'lose its prestigious centrality', that does not mean that myth, or a form of mythmaking, will cease to be central within society. Branscomb, like Mustazza, believes that Riddley's 'roading,' which follows the circular pattern set out by the children's rhyme 'Fools Circel 9wys,' is "without meaning, but Riddley must first come to terms with it before he can escape from it" (34). Mustazza and Branscomb, however, end their readings too early, when the '1 littl 1' (gunpowder) is rediscovered. Mustazza, in particular, underestimates the power of 'the contrived' puppet show and does not realize all of the ramifications that go along with it. For me and my reading of *Riddley Walker*, it is precisely the Walker and Orfing show that is the key to understanding the novel.

As Nancy Dew Taylor rightly asserts in her article "...You bes go ballsey," after Riddley learns all these lessons from his travels, he "must act; he must make some kind of move by which he will attempt to change his world. He does so by creating stories, (his novel and the puppet show) and these are the real stories connected with the novel's future time" (35). Riddley realizes that his past experiences influence all that he has become, and he recognizes the omnipresence of the past in his new stories when he becomes a modern day mythmaker for this world in transition:

> The boar kicking on the end of my spear hewl be in my shows I don't know how but hewl be there. That crow what callit, 'Fall! Fall! Fall!' and my smasht father that greyling morning at Widders Dump and that old leader with his yeller eyes and woar down teef. Gransers head glimmering in the twean lite and Goodparley sitting qwyet in amongst the black and nekkit aulders loppt of pink and red in the heart of his wud in the stoan in his head and the twean lite holding its breaf and lissening. (207)

Riddley, combining his experiences with myth (namely "The hart of the Wood"), realizes how dependent people are on the past and myths, and how important they are in the shaping and ordering of what is to come. Following the death of Riddley's father, Goodparley attempts to console Riddley when he says, "wel that's behynt us now innit. Now your going to be the new connexion man and making new connections" (Hoban 36). Even at this early stage, however, Riddley is quite in tune with the power and pervasiveness of the past and myths when he replies: "No it aint jus behynt us its all roun us. Over and unner as wel" (38).

Mark Schorer's "The Necessity of Myth" sheds light upon the manifestations of myth in a modern world in a state of transition. He asserts that "even when, as in a modern civilization, myths multiply and separate and

tend to become abstract so that the images themselves fade, even then they are still the essential substructure of all human activity" (357). He continues: "Myth, continually modified and renewed by the modifications of history, is an indispensable ingredient of all culture" (357). Moreover, Schorer thinks that, in a disintegrating society [or I argue one that has disintegrated and is disintegrating like the one we see in Hoban's novel], "before we can proceed with other business, literature, [and I would argue art – including puppet shows] must become the explicit agent of coherence. And authors are compelled to build a useable mythology, one that will account for, and organize our competing and fragmentary [or fractured] myths" (357). This is precisely what Riddley and Orfing do with their new Punch show.

Riddley and Orfing's choice to perform their first show at Weaping Form is a significant one. It is an indication of the fracturing of the cycle towards progress and nuclear destruction, as Weaping Form is not a part of the Fool's circle of 9wys rhyme. As Nancy Dew Taylor points out:

> The most significant result of Easyer's interference – and the most promising for the future – is that this time the baby is 'saved.' We, [as readers], are taken back, to the very first story in the book, "The hart of the Wood" in which the parents trade their baby's life to Me Clevver – and we are taken back to Goodparley's Punch and Pooty show in which Punch beats both Pooty and the baby to death. (37)

Taylor then goes on to say:

> Even though Riddley knows that it is inevitable that Punch will always kill the baby if he can [that man will always hunger for technology and progress] – Easyer's 'inner fearants' have set up the right kind of interference, the right kind of response: he prevents a repetition of history. (37)

Although I agree with Taylor's analysis, I feel that Easyer's interference is much more significant than simply preventing the repetition of history. His interference is indicative of independent thought and action, something that was entirely absent from members of the uneducated mass prior to this moment. What Easyer is effectively doing by interfering with Riddley's Punch and Pooty performance is writing his own ending to the story he is being told. He is interpreting the events which are transpiring, deciding that he does not agree with them, and taking the initiative to effect change. Easyer, with Riddley's new show, is able to actively question what is being presented and he also has the forum from which to do so without encountering any major repercussions.

Mustazza's assertion that Walker and Orfing's show is "too self-consciously contrived to gain a strong foothold as a cultural ritual" is shortsighted; he is failing to lend due weight to the final scene of the novel. The new puppet show does have the potential to gain a strong foothold within this burgeoning culture – and 'potentiality' is indeed at the core of Hoban's novel. Upon finishing the show:

> Riddley and Orfing didn't over the night there. [They] roadit out in to the dark and Rightway hit it on him he wantit to be on the move right then. Him and his brother Deaper they both come with [them] they didn't want to stop at Weaping no mor. They both of them have wives and childer the lot roadit out with [them] they jus slung ther bundels and a way. (219)

With only one performance, Walker already has followers.

In the course of my research for this paper, what surprised me the most was that only Joan Smith, in her M.A. thesis, acknowledges that Riddley

himself becomes myth embodied. Myth is not, as Mustazza argues, rejected for history within the text; rather, Riddley actually becomes the new myth. From the outset of the novel, Riddley's existence is marked (or some might say marred) by extraordinary events. On his naming day, 3 events transpire and Lorna the 'tel woman' proclaims:

> 3 things and blipful all of them. 1 is Brooder Walker kilt in the digging. 2 is the baby dead beartht at the form. 3 is the old dog ofering and took by brooder Walkers son. (Hoban 23)

Riddley's beginnings are the stuff that legends are made of. Moreover, once Riddley gives his infamous 1st tel in which he proclaims "EUSAS HEAD IS DREAMING US" (61) he is immortalized in a rhyme:

> Littl Nimbel Potter and that lot waiting for a site of him sing:
> Riddley Walker wernt no talker
> Didn't know what to say
> Put his head up on a poal
> And then it tol all day. (63)

Riddley immediately recognizes the prophetic nature of this simple rhyme and the latent power of language: "Wel you know 1ce the kids singing at you that a cern kynd of track youre on nor there aint too much you can do about it" (63). As we have seen with Fools Circel 9wys, there is power and truth encased within a rhyme. Also, interestingly enough, the 'cern kynd of track' that Riddley is on is tied explicitly to the Eusa myth: "Put his head up on a poal/ And then it tol all day." Mythmaking comes full circle at the novel's completion and is echoed in the rhyme of the kid "with the "sharp littl face" who chants:

> Riddley Walkers ben to show
> Riddley Walkers on the go
> Don't go Riddley Walker's track
> Drop Johns ryding on his back. (219)

So effectively, Riddley and his wanderings become a warning, a moral lesson just like the original Eusa story. Still, Riddley "wunt have no other track" (220). If Riddley's story becomes the 'new gospel' it will be a gospel of process, personal progress and individuation. He realizes that in the society in which he lives, the only means by which to avoid the dangerous potentiality of man's lusts, a second '1 big 1,' is to recognize that the "Onley power is no power." One must look within oneself – master changyis must come from within - and although man does have a frighteningly destructive potential, he also has the potential for healing and recuperation. In *Riddley Walker*, the key to unleashing this regenerative power is mythmaking and storytelling. The link between Riddley discovering who he is and writing his autobiography is no accident. As Bernstein outlines in "Self-Knowledge as Praxis": the purpose of secular autobiographies "is the revelation – the producing and securing – of the identity of the narrated/narrating self" (65). It is through taking responsibility and telling his own story that Riddley finally asserts and defines himself and leads an authentic life.

After reading an interview with Russell Hoban, Leonard Mustazza exclaimed: "Russell Hoban makes what I consider to be a surprising statement. Asked if he thinks a 'mythic sense' is present in his novels, he admits that he sees such a sense but adds 'I didn't start out planning that way, but I noted its development'" (26). I think it is so surprising to Mustazza because he is unwilling to accept or acknowledge the pervasiveness of myth – people cannot help drawing upon them. If he continued reading the interview, Mustazza would realize that Russell Hoban himself believes that "more and more, my

point of view gets less anthropocentric," and that "the mythmaking capability is an essential one, and it is a resource that is not used enough. Rational thinking is not enough to get us through what we have to get through" (Myers 11,9).

The mythmaking capability which Hoban speaks of is a regenerative one, one which allows us to cope with the trials of life as it allows us to dream about that which we desire. This mythmaking capability which we possess can easily be compared with our capability to envision utopia. In *The Concept of Utopia* Ruth Levitas argues that the most essential concept of utopia is "desire – the desire for a different way of being" (181). Within this broad understanding of utopia, Levitas identifies three functions of Utopian discourse: compensation, critique and change (Franko 77), and, as Carol Franko outlines in "The I-We Dilemma," "Levitas argues that the question of agency is the key for utopian discourse" (77). As we see from the course of this study, then, Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* is the text which comes the closest to satisfying all three of Levitas's criteria for utopia: Riddley is the only protagonist who, through the spoken and written word, is able to compensate for the actions of the past, critique his present society, and possess the forum and agency with which to effect change within his society, and more importantly, within himself. Hoban's *Riddley Walker* then is rife with hope and potential for a better way of being, and if Carol Franko were to read *Riddley Walker* she might discover a text which comes to terms with, or perhaps even solves, the 'I-We dilemma.' The only power is no power, and if we first solve the problem of the I, perhaps, as in the case of Riddley Walker, the We will literally follow.

Thus, it is in the sparse landscape of Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* that we, as readers, find the potential to work towards and possibly achieve utopia. In this post-holocaust world Riddley is able to engage with, interpret, and act upon not only the central Eusa myth which informs life on the 'forms,' but also all the rhymes, tales, fables, and shows that he has encountered since childhood. Riddley becomes a prophet-teacher for those around him. Perhaps the only power is no power and it is only when individuals stop attempting to achieve a singularly static vision of utopia and begin to notice all of life's subtleties that we may be able to begin creeping towards individual concepts of utopia and authentic selfhoods. That is what the dreamer in me says anyway. These are my on-withs, simply ink on paper. Make of them what you will, for that is where the true power of a story lies.

CONCLUSION

As I sit here, attempting to figure out a way to conclude this thesis, a thought has occurred to me as I stare blankly at my computer – one of the greatest technological advancements of the Twentieth Century. I have come to realize and ardently believe that, in today's world, we need stories more than ever. The Egyptians built their pyramids, the Greeks and Romans their temples; mysterious rock formations still perplexingly stand at Stonehenge. All of these have become enduring symbols of civilizations past, both known and unknown. They seem to be permanent fixtures which attempt to tell the tale of peoples from the past, and, no doubt, which served to provide the people of those ancient civilizations with a sense of who they were – they were the people who built those pyramids, temples and rock formations – their monuments would become records of who they were for those that would follow...What lasting monuments will we leave that will tell those who follow us who we were? What will be our legacy? ...The plans for the Atomic Bomb perhaps? In today's fast paced world, where technology is ever-changing and daily life zooms past at alarming speed, individuals, perhaps now more than ever, feel fragmented and lost, without a sense of who they actually are, simply swept up in the juggernaut that we call 'progress'. With all these astonishing changes we no longer possess any sense of continuity, stability or permanence – perhaps we are a society in which the individual is on the verge of becoming extinct.

One of the only means through which this catastrophe can be avoided is through communication, and I would argue, through the communication of

'that which can be' – the utopian novel. As was stated at the start of this thesis, it is between the pages of a book where the reader attempts to discover who he or she is as well as who he or she can become – present and future. The utopian novel thus becomes the ideal locus for this attempted discovery to take place. As Paul Tillich says:

> Where no anticipating utopia opens up possibilities we find a stagnant, sterile present – we find a situation in which not only individual but also cultural realization of human possibilities is inhibited and cannot win through to fulfillment. The present, for men who have no utopia, is inevitably constricting; and similarly, cultures which have no utopia remain imprisoned in the present and quickly fall back into the past, for the present can be fully alive only in tension between past and future. This is the fruitfulness of utopia – its ability to open up possibilities. (qtd. in Manuel xxi)

People need utopia in order to imagine what can be. Unfortunately, one could argue that our present has become sterile, devoid of interaction and human contact. After all, why should someone go down the hall and have a conversation when he can simply send an e-mail? It is for this reason that I feel, in these chaotic times, utopian literature is now more important than ever. We must continue to explore utopian possibilities or the result may be disastrous.

As we have seen throughout the course of this thesis, in order to be successful, utopian literature must first open up possibilities to the individual. Classic utopias such as Thomas More's *Utopia* and William Morris's *News From Nowhere*, as well as dystopias such as George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, remain unsatisfactory and ultimately fail, precisely because they leave no space in which the individual can truly exist. With no room in these societies for individual thought or expression, readers are unable to fully engage with the

text, as they cannot relate on a personal level. As a result, the true potential of the utopian text can never be realized. As Lewis Mumford explains:

> Perhaps for the great majority of men and women that small, private Utopia is the only one for which they feel a perpetual, warm interest; and ultimately every other utopia must be translatable to them in some such intimate terms. (Mumford 19)

Although Mumford was writing at the turn of the twentieth century, his assertions hold true today and he understood that, fundamentally, for utopia to be successful it must first resonate with an individual on a personal level.

As we have seen with Sheri Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country*, Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*, and, to some extent, George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Stavia, Riddley, and even Winston turn to the spoken and written word, driven by the mythmaking and storytelling impulse, in an attempt to make their experiences intelligible to themselves as well as define who they are. They use and manipulate language in order to achieve an authentic self, as the manipulation of language is the key mechanism used in utopian literature to either create or negate selfhood. Winston, Stavia and Riddley, however, must be able to interpret the stories around them and then possess a forum from which to tell their own stories in order to successfully achieve that selfhood.

In *Nineteen Eighty Four*, however, Winston Smith is unable to properly interpret the stories he is told, nor does he possess a forum from which to tell his story; all avenues of personal expression are closed to him by The Party. As a result, he fails to achieve selfhood and is ultimately destroyed. In *The Gate to Women's Country*, Stavia is an astute interpreter and learns the truths about the society in which she lives; however, her personal voice is stifled like

Winston's, as the councilwomen force her to keep her story silent and merely reiterate the fabricated myth upon which Women's Country is founded. Stavia, in order to cope, must create two personalities – private Stavia and public Stavia – and remains divided and unfulfilled. It is not until Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* that we see the union of interpreter and storyteller, and thus a protagonist, Riddley, who is able to achieve and assert an authentic selfhood. It is only when he tells his own story and writes the book we read, however, that he is truly able to achieve and assert that authentic selfhood.

Riddley's novel, then, becomes his own personal monument which he leaves for the people to come. Perhaps books and stories are truly one of the sole 'monuments' which we are able to leave behind – the plays and sonnets of Shakespeare still sit on the shelf at the local library, and, more importantly, are still widely read. In today's society it is the story and the mythmaking impulse which stand the test of time and offer us comfort and continuity in our fragmented world. Thus, if we are to achieve utopia – or at least come one step closer to attaining the unattainable – people must tell their individual stories. They must translate and relay their version of utopia to others, making their private utopia public. For it is my assertion that true utopia must not and *cannot* begin with a collective vision of a perfect world for all. True utopia must begin at the level of the individual and radiate outwards. All it takes to begin the journey towards self-actualization and even utopia is a single idea and a single voice with which to communicate that idea. For a single idea has more latent power to effect social change than anything else if the individual has the courage and the forum from which to share that idea:

> [The] world of ideas...is almost as sound, almost as real, almost as inescapable as the brick of our houses or the asphalt beneath our feet. The "belief" that the world was flat was once upon a time more important than the "fact" that it was round; and that belief kept the sailors of the medieval word from wandering out of the sight of land as effectively as would a string of gun boats or floating mines...An idea is a solid fact, as theory is a solid fact, a superstition is a solid fact as long as people continue to regulate their actions in terms of the idea, theory, or superstition; and it is none the less solid because it is conveyed as an image or a breath of sound. (Mumford 14)

Utopia is important, and more importantly, utopia *is* possible. I refuse to believe otherwise. If I didn't believe in utopia, what would there be to look forward to? What would be the point of anything?:

> Without the Utopians of other times, men would still live in caves, miserable and naked. It was Utopians who traced the lines of the first city...Out of generous dreams come beneficial realities. Utopia is the principle of all progress, and the essay into a better future. (Mumford 22).

As the critical utopianists teach us, utopian literature does not provide us with blueprints for a better life. It is in the process of imagining utopia and reading utopian literature that we begin to envision possibilities for ourselves. It is only when we grapple with and attempt to resolve the inherent dualities that constitute utopia, that utopia becomes possible. More importantly, it is through interpreting those utopias, contemplating them, and then forming our own ideas and telling our own stories that we discover and define who we are. I not only believe in utopia, I ardently believe in the power of the simple phrase 'once upon a time'.

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